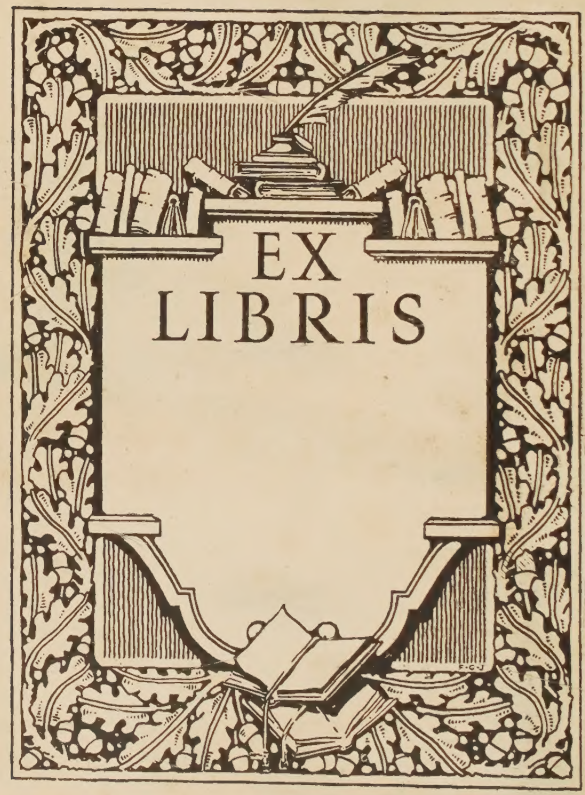
THE ROMANCE OF AN ELDERLY POET

REVEALED BY GEORGE CRABBE'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH ELIZABETH CHARTER

A. M. BROADLEY & WALTER JERROLD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THE ROMANCE OF AN ELDERLY POET

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Elizabeth Charter.

(from a Miniature.)

THE ROMANCE OF AN ELDERLY POET

A HITHERTO UNKNOWN CHAPTER IN THE LIFE OF GEORGE CRABBE REVEALED BY HIS TEN YEARS' CORRESPONDENCE WITH ELIZABETH CHARTER 1815–1825

BY

A. M. BROADLEY

AUTHOR OF "THE ROYAL MIRACLE," "DR. JOHNSON AND MRS. THRALE," ETC.

AND

WALTER JERROLD

AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THOMAS HOOD," "GEORGE MEREDITH: A STUDY," ETC.

WITH PHOTOGRAVURE FRONTISPIECE AND 16 ILLUSTRATIONS IN HALF-TONE

LONDON

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TO

LUCY MACKAY

OF THE GRANGE, TROWBRIDGE

THE FORTUNATE POSSESSOR OF MANY PRECIOUS RELICS OF

GEORGE CRABBE

AND

FANNY LAURA ELIZABETH CHARTER

OF GRATWICKE COTTAGE, FLAX BOURTON, SOMERSET

GREAT-NIECE AND GOD-DAUGHTER OF ELIZABETH CHARTER

THIS VOLUME IS INSCRIBED

June 18th, 1913

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Trowbridge	9
II.	Bath	27
III.	"Female Friends"	40
IV.	Elizabeth Charter	52
V.	An Old Album	63
VI.	Letters, 1815	77
VII.	Letters, 1816	123
VIII.	Letters, 1817	151
IX.	Letters, 1818	200
X.	Letters, 1819–20	226
XI.	Letters, 1821–25	251
XII.	The End	287
	Index	303

ILLUSTRATIONS

Elizabeth Charter, from a miniature . . *Frontispiece*

Facing page

George Crabbe, from a portrait by Miss Sharples in the Bristol Art Gallery 18

Trowbridge Church in 1830, from an old print . . 38

Trowbridge Church—interior, from an old print . . 56

George Crabbe, from a painting by William Millington in the possession of Mrs. Mackay, the Grange, Trowbridge 78

The Rectory, Trowbridge, in 1913, from a photograph . 94

George Crabbe's Study in Trowbridge Rectory, as it is in 1913 116

George Crabbe, from a sketch, taken in 1826 . . . 138

Crabbe's Mulberry Tree, in the garden of Trowbridge Rectory, from a photograph 162

A Trowbridge Street in 1814, from a water-colour in the possession of Mrs. Mackay, the Grange, Trowbridge . 180

George Crabbe, from a pencil drawing in the collection of A. M. Broadley 196

Bath, from a water-colour by David Cox, in the collection of A. M. Broadley 214

Pulteney Street, Bath, from an old print . . . 232

Richard Warner, from a miniature in the collection of A. M. Broadley 250

Facing page

Wilbury House, Wilts, from a photograph by Houlton Bros. 268

Westcroft House, Trowbridge, from a photograph by Houlton Bros. 282

George Crabbe's first letter to Elizabeth Charter (facsimile) 300

PREFACE

THE biography of Crabbe has been written in widely differing fashions. There is the more or less formal biography compiled by his son as an introductory volume to the poet's collected works; there is the somewhat slight monograph in the English Men of Letters series by the late Canon Ainger, and there is the elaborate volume by Dr. René Huchon. In each of these the personality of the poet somewhat eludes us, for neither the younger Crabbe, Canon Ainger, nor Dr. Huchon makes any attempt to deal with the parson-poet as a letter-writer, although he lived in an age when letter-writing was still regarded as one of the fine arts. Crabbe must have been all through his life a most energetic letter-writer, and could the whole of his vast correspondence be recovered and carefully gone through it may well be that a selection including representative letters to his varied correspondents would reveal the man far better than have all of his biographers.

Here we have, for the most part, the letters which he wrote to but one correspondent, yet they form a complete series, and reveal one side of the poet's character with some fullness. True as was Byron's summing up of him as "Nature's sternest painter," the frequent repetition of that phrase has perhaps had the effect of

doing him something of an injustice, in that sternness has come to be associated with him to the exclusion of other qualities. Some years ago a series of his letters addressed to Mrs. Leadbeater indicated the innate sentimentalism of Crabbe's nature, and it is that side of it which is most fully shown in the letters which he addressed to Miss Elizabeth Charter.

Next summer[1] it will be just one hundred years since George Crabbe became Rector of Trowbridge, and the centenary of that event may well be marked by this record of a friendship that dated from within a few months of the poet's arrival in his Wiltshire rectory,—a friendship about which Crabbe's biographers have nothing to say, for Elizabeth Charter's name even was apparently unknown to them. It is only since M. Huchon completed his critical and biographical study of the poet that the correspondence with Miss Charter has been recovered (and has been added, with further of the poet's pocket diaries, to the accumulation of Crabbeana at the Knapp), that Miss Charter's album has been made available, and that other fresh materials have come to light.[2]

[1] George Crabbe reached Trowbridge on June 1, 1814. It is hoped next summer to commemorate in some appropriate manner the 100th anniversary of his arrival in the picturesque Wiltshire town, where he spent the last eighteen years of his active life.

[2] M. René Huchon during the writing of his exhaustive thesis (for thesis it was) on Crabbe, made extensive use of the whole of the Knapp collection, which did not then include the Charter correspondence, since acquired from the poet's descendants and other owners. Writing of the collection he found so essential to the completeness of his own researches, M. Huchon says:—

"The Crabbe Collection formed by Mr. Broadley follows step by step the 'Life' of the poet, written by his son in 1832–3; it aims at illustrating this biographical work by means of appropriate autographs, views and portraits. Thus, to be thoroughly appreciated, it must be taken and

Who Elizabeth Charter was, and of the meeting which resulted in at least ten years of epistolary friendship, is told in the course of the chapters that precede the actual correspondence, and incidentally touch upon and make clearer two other instances of what may be termed flirting-by-correspondence, a diversion in which Crabbe seems to have been all too ready to indulge. Of one of those instances both Canon Ainger and M. Huchon had something to say, their whole matter being derived from inaccurate transcripts from Crabbe's diaries made by Edward FitzGerald. We are able to correct those transcripts from the diaries themselves, and to give, in the letters to Miss Charter, Crabbe's own account of the

examined as a whole. Yet a few items of especial value may be pointed out.

. . . . . .

"All his readers know that Crabbe, driven by poverty and despair, fled his inhospitable Suffolk shore and came to London as a literary adventurer. There, too, he would have sunk, had not Burke 'taken him by the hand.' This momentous period of his life is represented in the Broadley collection by two most important documents, two letters to Burke: the first (undated, but probably written in February–March, 1781) is the famous appeal, printed in the Biography, to which Burke responded so eagerly and so generously; the second, more interesting still perhaps, from the critic's point of view, is a complete autobiography, unknown till quite recently, in which Crabbe narrates the events of his youth, the hardships he went through as an apprentice at Wickham Brook, near Newmarket, as an unsuccessful apothecary at Aldborough, as a penurious 'Candidate' for fame in London. This splendid autograph of at least six quarto pages, very closely written, is and will remain unique as a Crabbe document.

. . . . . .

"Brought into full relief by his correspondence and that of many contemporaries, by numberless views and portraits, the Biography of the poet assumes something of the intensity of real life. When rising from these volumes, we seem to have lived with him and in his circle. Thus did the men and women of the time write and look; we might almost say thus did they speak. Through their handwritings we see into their hearts; their minds are awake or asleep as are their eyes. Humble, but observant, among so many grandees and celebrities, Crabbe quietly studies them as well as himself, and takes us into his confidence."

romantic episode which, but for a kind of non-committal timidity in his character, would have reached its due climax in a second marriage.

Not only do these letters illustrate Crabbe's sentiment and throw fresh light on the latter part of his life—the year which he passed in Wiltshire—they also afford the occasion for drawing upon Elizabeth Charter's album—kindly lent to us by Miss F. L. Elizabeth Charter, her great-niece—an album which contains a number of interesting items, including a " declaration " in verse by Crabbe, a poem by Lord Byron, memorial verses by William Lisle Bowles and Robert Southey, and a remarkable brief essay on poetry by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, besides a number of varied pieces by writers who did not aspire to anything more than the twilight immortality afforded by an album.

Our thanks are due, and are gratefully tendered to those who have so cordially rendered us assistance in the preparation of this volume : to Miss F. L. E. Charter for the loan of her aunt's album ; to Mrs. Mackay of the Grange, Trowbridge, for a hitherto unpublished portrait of Crabbe and for letters ; to the Directors of the Bristol Art Gallery for permission to reproduce the portrait of the poet in their possession ; to the Rev. Percy A. Nash, the present Rector of Trowbridge, for much kind assistance ; to Miss Sarah Anne Wilkins, the present possessor of Westcroft, once the home of the Waldrons, and whose parents Crabbe married, for interesting reminiscences of the old Rector who always insisted on his right to give the brides such an embrace as the " poke-bonnets " of the period allowed of ; to Messrs. W. and S. Houlton, of Trowbridge, for a series

of admirable photographs; and last but not least to the late Sir Edward Malet, G.C.B. (a cousin of Elizabeth Charter), who felt the keenest interest in the present work, and devoted one of the last letters he ever wrote to an interesting account of the connection between the Wiltshire Malets and the Somerset Charters. Useful aid in various directions has also been given to the editors in the course of their researches concerning the persons and places mentioned in the Crabbe-Charter correspondence by Sir John Fuller, K.C.M.G., and Lady Fuller, Lady Antrobus, Dr. René Huchon, Mr. C. Tite of Taunton, Sir N. J. Highmore, the Rev. Canon Mayo, Mr. H. E. Medlicott of Sandfield, Mr. John Hammond of Salisbury, Major J. Warre Malet, and Mr. T. H. W. Malet.

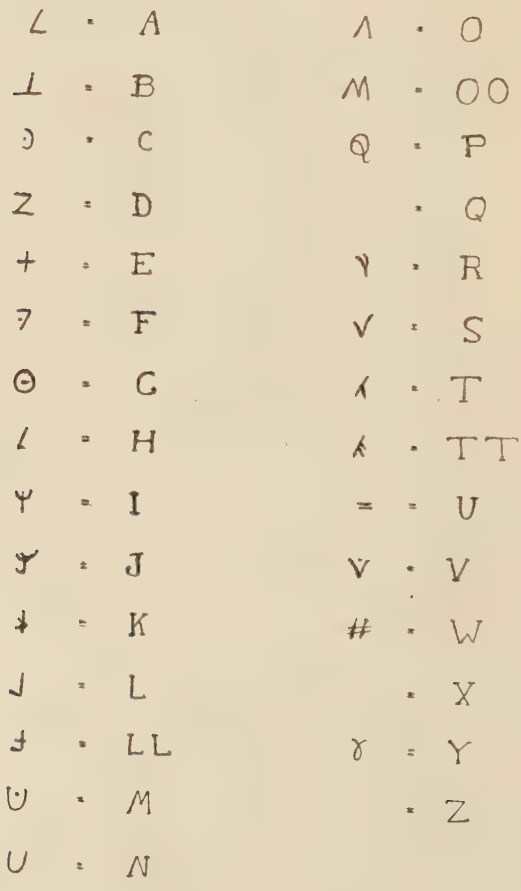
A. M. B.
W. J.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF THE LIFE OF GEORGE CRABBE

A.D.	Aet.	
1754	—	George Crabbe, born Dec. 24th at Aldeburgh, Suffolk, son of George Crabbe, collector of salt duties.
1768	14	Apprenticed as errand boy to a doctor at Wickham Brook, near Bury St. Edmunds.
1771	17	Apprenticeship transferred to a surgeon at Woodbridge.
1772	18	Introduced to Sarah Elmy, and became engaged to her. Contributed verses to *Wheble's Magazine.*
1774	20	Published, anonymously, *Inebriety.*
1775	21	Returned to Aldeburgh, to work in a warehouse. Afterwards visited London, to "pick up a little surgical knowledge"; returned to Aldeburgh and there became assistant to a surgeon, to whose unprofitable practice he soon after succeeded.
1780	26	Removed to London to seek a living by literature. *The Candidate.*
1781	27	Wrote to, and met, Edmund Burke. *The Library.* Admitted to deacon's orders and licensed as curate to the Rector of Aldeburgh.
1782	28	Took priest's orders (Aug.). Appointed chaplain to the Duke of Rutland at Belvoir.
1783	29	*The Village.* Married to Sarah Elmy. (Dec.)
1784	30	First child born (died young).
1785	31	Became curate of Stathern, Leicestershire. Son, George, born Nov. *The Newspaper.*
1786	32	Father died.
1787	33	Son, John, born Oct.
1788	34	*A Discourse on . . . the Death of the Duke of Rutland.*
1789	35	Rector of Muston and Allington, Leicestershire.
1792	38	Removed to Parham, Suffolk, as curate of Sweffling and Great Glemham.
1805	51	Returned to Muston.
1807	53	*Poems. The Parish Register.*
1810	56	*The Borough.*
1812	58	*Tales.*
1813	59	Mrs. Crabbe died (Sept. 21st).
1814	60	Rector of Trowbridge, Wilts. Engaged to Charlotte Ridout and engagement broken off.
1815	61	First met Elizabeth Charter.
1817	63	Son, John, became his curate at Trowbridge.
1819	65	*Tales of the Hall.*
1822	68	Visited Sir Walter Scott at Edinburgh.
1832	77	Died at Trowbridge, Feb. 3.
1834		*Collected Works* in 8 vols., with biography, by George Crabbe, junior.

GEORGE CRABBE'S CYPHER

A KEY to the cypher employed by Crabbe may be of use to those who are the fortunate possessors of any of the pocket diaries which he kept over a long series of years, and of interest to others.



THE ROMANCE OF AN ELDERLY POET

CHAPTER I

TROWBRIDGE

"What pleasures in the meeting rise!"
The World of Dreams.

"I HAVE, though at considerable distances, six female friends, unknown to each other, but all dear, very dear to me." Such might be the words of a Don Juan, or of one of those traditionally licensed libertines of love, the sailors who were credited with having "several wives in various ports." Quite other is their origin. They were written in a letter to a lady by a man of over sixty, a clergyman, a widower, and a poet—George Crabbe. Whether all of his "female friends" kept the letters of their elderly correspondent is not known; that some of them did is, however, certain, and it is mainly the letters received by one of their number that will be found in this volume. Those letters, with their sentiment and their self-revelation, are probably quite unlike anything that clergymen and poets may be engaged in writing to "female friends" from country parsonages in these days of four-ounces-for-a-penny

letters, of picture post cards, telegrams, telephones, and other means of hasty communication which have struck a fatal blow at the epistolary art as it was understood by our grandparents of a century ago.

That good letters are being written in the twentieth century our grandchildren will probably learn in the course of time, but that their character will be found to be widely different from that of the eighteenth century is certain. Other times, other manners of self-expression. Though the series of letters here given was begun in the year of the Battle of Waterloo, they are true eighteenth century in form and spirit, for the writer, though he bridged in his productive life one of the most remarkable transitions in our poetic history, was a product of that century. In literature he was "Nature's sternest painter," in life—certainly in his later life—he was a sentimentalist, one delighting especially in the homage and companionship of women; and ever, as it would seem, toying with the idea of re-marriage, but lacking the courage or the decision to change that loneliness which preyed upon him for the domesticity in which he delighted.

* * *

In the memoir of Crabbe by his son we learn of Mrs. Crabbe's continuous ill-health. "In the summer of 1813, my mother, though in a very declining state of health, having a strong inclination to see London once more, a friend in town procured us those very eligible rooms for sight-seers, in Osborne's Hotel, Adelphi, which were afterwards occupied by their sable majesties of Otaheite. We entered London in the beginning of

July, and returned at the end of September." The "we" was evidently the whole family, the poet, his wife, and their two sons; but the younger George Crabbe evidently trusted to his memory in making this record, for in the poet's pocket-diary for this year is entered under August:

"Went to London. See Journal kept there for all except expenses. Arrived on the 2d and returned on the 29th lodged at the Adelphi, Osborne's Hotel. Bill £54. Carys. £14. Expenses of many kinds about £70.—Returned."

The "Carys." is probably cargs.—abbreviated "car riages," and may be taken as indicating the expenses of travelling. The stay in London was thus not three months as averred in the biography, nor "two or three months" as stated by M. Huchon, but rather less than a month according to the poet's own contemporary record. Indeed, Mrs. Crabbe died at the Leicestershire parsonage at a time when according to her son she was still in London, for it was September 21, 1813, at Muston (where he had been rector since 1789) that George Crabbe's wife died after a long illness that was accompanied by mental malady. In his pocket-diary of that date Crabbe wrote, in that cipher which he frequently employed in these little books, "Mrs. Crabbe died," adding in ordinary writing "3 morng." Immediately after her death the poet himself fell ill—so ill that he is said to have begged that his wife's grave might not be closed until it was seen whether it would not be required for himself also. In the memoir of the poet by his son are the following significant words following the account of Mrs. Crabbe's death, which is

erroneously given as having occurred on October 21 : "'Never,' said her own sister, 'was there a better husband, except that he was too indulgent.' But so large a portion of her married life was clouded by her lamentable disorder, that I find written by my father on the outside of a beautiful letter of her own, dated long before this calamity, 'Nothing can be more sincere than this, nothing more reasonable and affectionate ; and yet happiness was denied.'" There is something pathetic in those closing words as epitaph to a married life of thirty years, a married life, it must be remembered, that had only been entered upon after about eight years of patient waiting.

With Crabbe's married life, however, we are not here concerned. When we take up the story of his life, the study of his character, he is already a man of sixty with grown-up sons, he is a clergyman of thirty-two years' experience, a poet acknowledged by the critics and recognised by the generality of readers, and a welcome if infrequent companion in the chief literary and social circles of his time. We take up his story, indeed, when he had attained an age and a position at which the lives of literary men generally cease to be interesting, when their "adventures" are all overpast, their character has become known, and their best work has already been given to the world. But though Crabbe was nearing his grand climacteric he was yet to have sentimental adventures, was yet to reveal something of a fresh aspect of his character, and was yet to produce poems marked by passages which in some respects are acknowledged to have been "finer than anything he had yet achieved,"[1] and thus the later years, the sentimental

[1] Canon Ainger.

journey of his widowerhood, are not without interest as affording something of a revelation of the character of him both as a man and as a poet.

* * *

Before passing from that earlier life, which does not here concern us, it may be interesting to copy a page from Crabbe's diary for 1813, for the contrast which it affords between the taxation of to-day and that of just a century ago. It will be observed that in those "good old days" the tax on light was no inconsiderable item. The page is headed "Tax Assessment":

"12 Windows	4.	9.	6.
Rent £5. House		7.	6.
Male servt higher one / inferior one	2.	10.	—
Horses 2 duty	8.	19.	—
Cart 2 ,, ...	1.	8.	—
Dogs 2 ,, ...	1.	3.	—
Hair powder one	1.	3.	6.
	20.	—	6."

In the same year among books bought it is interesting to find noted "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers," in which Byron, deviating from his accustomed severity, wrote:

> "There be, who say, in these enlighten'd days,
> That splendid lies are all the poet's praise;
> That strain'd invention, ever on the wing,
> Alone impels the modern bard to sing.
> 'Tis true that all who rhyme—nay, all who write—
> Shrink from that fatal word to genius—trite;
> Yet Truth sometimes will lend her noblest fires,
> And decorate the verse herself inspires:
> This fact in Virtue's name let Crabbe attest;
> Though nature's sternest painter, yet the best."

* * *

After the death of his wife, and his own recovery from illness, Crabbe may well have welcomed the opportunity of getting amid new surroundings that was afforded him by the Duke of Rutland's proposal that he should exchange the living of Muston in Leicestershire for that of Trowbridge in Wiltshire, though there was some small trouble over the exchange which need not here detain us. In his diary Crabbe simply put the cipher entry under November 17–18 : " Duke's letter. Trowbridge."

Possibly the matter was talked over between the Duke and the poet, for against December 14–15 in his diary the latter wrote : " Churches. Chr. Day. Morning at Sedgbrook. Afternoon at Muston and morning on Sunday," and then added in cipher : " Belvoir. Dinner," which presumably meant that he was to dine at Belvoir Castle on Christmas Day, though it may be a record that he had dined there on the 15th. At the end of the diary of this year Crabbe entered some interesting particulars of the value of his new living, which suggest that he was not likely to be a loser by the exchange. The full entry is as follows :

" Value of Trowbridge living

Tithe of 1778 acres of land . .	460.	—	—
Glebe 50 acres	174.	—	—
House etc.	50.	—	—
Offerings, fees and payments for Evening lessons . . .	81.	7.	—
Staverton payment . . .	17.	—	—
	782.	7.	—

64 Houses—on ye Glebe
Invality of Staverton Payment
Unlimited right of pasturage on Ashton Common."

Any troubles about the exchange were overcome and arrangements duly concluded, and on March 18, 1814, Crabbe was in London and entered in his diary on that day: "Instituted to Trowbridge. At night to see Kean in Shylock."[1] Two days later: "This evening at Drury Lane. Kean in Hamlet." Then came a brief visit to Trowbridge, a return to Muston, and a visit to East Anglian relatives. In May he was in London finally *en route* for his new rectory, and his partiality for the theatre is again shown, for on the 27th of that month there is the entry: "Kemble in Macbeth," and then on June 1: "Arrived at Trowbridge." Two days later he was inducted into his new living, and two days later again he preached his first sermon in the church of the town which was to be the centre of his spiritual care, and, but for occasional excursions to London and elsewhere, of his social life for the remainder of his years.

* * *

His biographer-son gives the following scraps from the preacher's diary at this time:

"5th June,—first sermon at Trowbridge. 8th. Evening,—solitary walk—night—change of opinion—easier, better, happier."

To what the "change of opinion" may refer there is no clue, but it must be recalled that after the severe illness that followed upon the death of his wife Crabbe had suffered from fits of deep depression, and was to do so occasionally afterwards, though in the course of time the buoyancy of his nature reasserted itself, and in his new surroundings he gradually took on new

[1] Kean had made his first appearance at Drury Lane in the rôle of Shylock on January 26, 1814.

happiness. It is true, as his correspondence shows, that he frequently toyed with the idea of remarriage, and the very idea may have served to lessen the loneliness which he felt in his womanless home. His son in chronicling those words "change of opinion—easier, better, happier" adds by way of comment that he will not guess to what they refer. It is, of course, only possible to guess, but it may be that the poet had held earlier views against second marriages, and with his acknowledged liking for what in his time would be termed "female society," might well dread the perspective of loneliness ahead of him. The change of opinion, it may be, was connected with this subject, and the mere realisation of that change might well have inspired the more cheerful words with which the entry closes.

On the night of his arrival at Trowbridge Crabbe was welcomed by Mr. John Waldron, of Westcroft House, a Trowbridge manufacturer and magistrate, and his family, and with them was soon to be on terms of cordial intimacy. It may be that he had received flattering homage from Waldron's daughter Maria—with whom gossip was persistently to associate his name—and that for a moment, as a later poet has it, she "blossomed in the light of tender personal regards." It is true that not many months had elapsed since Mrs. Crabbe's death, but it is also true that within a year of her death Crabbe became definitely engaged. It may even be that he had already met the lady to whom he was to become engaged—though this is not probable—and that she had already awakened in him the sentiment of affection that made him dream of future possibilities.

* * *

Trowbridge, a small town associated since the time of Henry the Eighth with the making of Kerseymere broadcloth and other woollen stuffs, is not far from the Somersetshire border of Wiltshire. As old Leland put it in quaint fashion in his "Itinerary," "the town standith on a rokky hillet, and is very welle buildid of stone, and flourishith by drapery." At the foot of this "rokky hillet" runs the River Biss, which about a mile or so away flows into the Avon some miles above Bath. The woollen manufacture of the place had so developed that in the year before Crabbe removed thither the whole site whereon anciently stood the castle about which the town had grown up—the castle was already "clene doun" all but the remains of two of its seven towers in Leland's time—was sold for the erection of factories connected with the staple trade.

The town, situated in the midst of pleasant, prosperous agricultural country, with its busy looms and activity, may well have appealed to the poet who combined an appreciation of natural scenes with that study of his fellows which enabled him to produce his realistic portraiture of people. Indeed, Crabbe wrote to a friend saying that he liked the country around and the town itself very much, though he was at times to feel the want of congenial intellectual society, and of that social intercourse for which his nature craved. It is true that he made a few friends in Trowbridge, and those some of the staunchest, but he often looked longingly towards Bath with its fuller social life, its coming and going of people of the great world of Society, of men and women whom he knew and in whom he was interested, but Bath was not many miles away—and though distances a

century ago were comparatively much greater than to-day, it was easy to get there when any visitor whom he particularly wished to meet was likely to arrive. There was a daily coach from Trowbridge through Bradford to Bath, where its terminus was at the "Castle and Ball" (later changed to the "Castle"), and the rector delightedly took his seat in it whenever the opportunity occurred of paying a visit to visitors making a stay in the still fashionable watering-place.

* * *

When George Crabbe took up his residence at Trowbridge he was a recognised personality in the literary world, especially perhaps in the eyes of the older-fashioned folks, who were looking askance at the productions of some of the early nineteenth-century poets. Most of his work of value had been already published, and he himself was widely known as one of the chief poets of his time. It is true that since his earliest volumes, those that, in the cant phrase, "made his name," had been given to the world Robert Burns had begun to sing of country things and human relationships with fresh lyric fervour, that Byron had begun to philosophise and present narratives with new force and spirit in poetry, and that Scott had captured the ear of the reading world with a glamorous versified romance. Crabbe had indeed already come to occupy the place of a veteran, an honoured veteran, in the regard of those who appreciated poetry, though it may well be believed that among the people of the Wiltshire manufacturing town he found but few who saw in him anything more than "the new parson," few who valued

GEORGE CRABBE

(From a portrait by Miss Sharples in the Bristol Art Gallery.)

him any the more for his genius as poet. Fate would perhaps have been more kindly had it given him one of the Bath churches as his centre of parochial usefulness, for again and again he was moved to mention the comparative isolation of the man of letters among the good people of Trowbridge.

* * *

With the Waldrons of Westcroft House Crabbe was to be on terms of the warmest intimacy, more or less habitually making one of the family party during their summer excursions to the seaside. Westcroft House still stands, a handsome old red-brick edifice which, though its immediate neighbourhood has, as the property owners say, "gone down," yet serves to suggest what it must have been like when John Waldron flourished there with his manufactory adjoining. If, however, time has treated unkindly this place to which Crabbe paid many kindly visits, it has but served further to mellow that Rectory which was for many years his home. It stands across the road from the church, a pleasant gabled building of grey stone with creeper-hung mullioned windows, and in many respects is as it was in the time that it was occupied by Crabbe. The poet's study was in the south-east angle of the house—in the front part of the accompanying photograph—and in it he had bookshelves erected which he desired should remain for the use of his successors, and there they still are, as shown in the interior view of the room as it is to-day. His bedroom—at any rate, after the arrival of his son John and his wife—was probably the one immediately over the study. That the house itself was

in a sad state of disrepair at the time when Crabbe took up his residence we gather from his letter to the Dean of Lincoln, which appears a few pages further on, and it is hinted at in a glimpse which his son affords of the study during the poet's occupancy :

" Would the reader like to follow my father into his library ?—a scene of unparalleled confusion—windows rattling, paint in great request, books in every direction but the right—the table—but no, I cannot find terms to describe it, though the counterpart might be seen perhaps, not one hundred miles from the study of the justly famed and beautiful rectory of Bremhill. Once, when we were staying at Trowbridge, in his absence for a few days at Bath, my eldest girl thought that she should surprise and please him by putting every book in perfect order, making the best bound the most prominent ; but on his return, thanking her for her good intention, he replaced every volume in its former state ; ' for,' said he, ' my dear, grandpapa understands his own confusion better than your order and neatness.' " Not all writers would accept so genially the " tidying up " of their books !

About the Rectory are grounds, six or seven acres in extent, well studded with fine old trees, the most notable of which may be regarded as Crabbe's mulberry, shown in the accompanying picture.

* * *

Crabbe was the thirty-first Rector of Trowbridge, his immediate predecessor having been the Rev. Gilbert Beresford, with whom there was some trouble over dilapidations and other matters, as we gather from the

following letters which the incoming rector addressed to Thomas Timbrell of Trowbridge, during the first few months of his residence:

"Sir,—A Letter from Mr. Hill Mortimer of Albany in Piccadilly Solicitor, a Gentleman who advises me in the present Business, informs me that you will assist in such Information as is necessary and which as Nominee in the Case of Money borrowed for the Repairs of this Rectory, you are enabled to do. I had written to Mr. Beresford for such Information, before I knew from Mr. Mortimer's Letter that you had acted in that Capacity. Have the Goodness then Sir to let me know the Sum received of the Representatives of Dr. Ekins and that borrowed of the Treasurer of Queen Ann's Bounty (I believe 1490£) and how both have been Expended. You will oblige us also by the Estimate delivered in by Mr. Fisher and what particulars were performed under that Estimate and how much remains to be done and whether any Money remains in your hands. This Information and whatever more may be needed which I have a right to require and indeed am enjoined to do so under Mr. Gilbert's Acts, you will I am sure willingly assist me and this I hope will be one Means of assisting us in forming our Opinion what must yet be done and by what Means.

"And now Once more Sir I can but ask your Attention to the Subject of Tithe and the very disagreeable Business which will of necessity be made of it, if the Error committed by the Sequestrators in paying Mr. Beresford be not rectified. Before I Summon these persons to Salisbury, several of them Small Occupiers to whom it will be very inconvenient I pray you Sir give the Matter another Consideration, and give me some Credit for Assertions which I make to prevent Trouble and Expence to my Parishioners and some of both to Mr. Beresford himself—First I assert that Tithes are

not a Compensation for Duties done or if they be they are not proportioned according to the Time when a Man continues to officiate. Secondly I do solemnly assure you, that (being well advised and fully informed of my Rights and all that was due to me) I received not one Shilling for the Duties performed by me in my Rectory from Michaelmas 1813 to the Ladyday following, knowing that no Tithe had arisen, whereas, if Mr. B's Claims be correct, I should have been paid half a years Compensation, for like him I also agreed from Mich. to Midr.—

"This at least proves what is my Opinion and that I acted in my own Case as I now require him to do, that is to receive a Compensation for tithe not according to an Agreement which *never was fulfilled*, but according to the real Value so far as it can be estimated of the Tithe which arose between Mich. 1812 and the Midsummer following.

"And in the last place Sir I do not fear to assert that had the Occupiers of Land foreseen that Mr. B. would have left the Rectory before the Hay was mowed or the Corn reaped or the Wool clipped, they would not have paid him at the same Rate as if he had stayed till all these Things were over and this is so plain a Case that I am much surprised it can be disputed: All I have further to remark is that no just Blame can fall upon me for asserting my Claims to my legal Dues though it should Cause, which I fear it will do, considerable Expence and Inconvenience to those who Can bear but little of either. But whatever be your Opinion on this Head, you will be so obliging as to Comply with my Requisitions respecting the Estimate and Expences as before mentioned.

"I am Sir,

"Your very obedient Serv.

"Geo. Crabbe.

"Mr. Mortimer informs me that the Value of this Rectory was entitled to be 796£ the Land Tax deducted,

(That with the Land Tax added, 775£ p Ann)—I will make no Objections upon this, but I will maintain two facts, one that this Rectory never paid 640£ (nor cleared, the proper Deductions made as the Act specifies,) £520."

That was concerning disputed tithe, of which it would seem that the superseded rector had taken more than his due share. The next letter relates to the carrying out of an agreement made before Crabbe's arrival:

"Sir,—Had I known at an earlier Time the State of your Agreement with Mr. Beresford and what had been promised and engaged for, respecting the Path-way I would have given you my Sentiments on the Subject, when you called upon me for that Purpose.

"Being now informed of the Business, I cannot but be a little surprised that neither Mr. Beresford nor you nor indeed any other Person till very lately, gave me sufficient knowledge of the Agreement which had been entered into and only waited Confirmation by the Magistrates and (I will take the liberty to add) my Consent.

"I do not mean to give any Opinion of, or to make any Objection to, what has been done: If the Piece of Land you have received in Exchange be a fair and equal Return for the Foot-way taken from your Land, I have no wish to dissolve the Agreement tho' I might have expected to have been applied to for my Assent, or at least might have been informed of the Exchange and not left to the accidental and late Information which I have received: be this as it may, I must still declare that I consider myself entirely free from any Obligation on account of my Predecessor's Engagements with you or the Magistrates and that I conceive no Person has a Right to call upon me to be at any Expence or trouble concerning the footway, etc., made in Consequence of the Exchange above mentioned, on the Contrary I shall

and do expect to have the Order of the Magistrates obeyed and their Confirmation of the new Ways declared, before I will consent to the Agreement itself and with Respect to the threatened Inducement, I am perfectly easy and shall not be at one Shilling Expence to avoid it.

" I have no Desire to do anything unkindly and much less unjustly, but I have been kept in Ignorance and nearly led into unnecessary Expences. It becomes me therefore to say, that I agree with you and the Magistrates that their Order should be obeyed and that speedily before the Winter sets in, and I expect Sir that it will be done otherwise I have no Doubt from what I hear that Complaint will be made of the public Inconvenience. Whether you or Mr. Beresford complete this Foot-way is a Matter I have nothing to do with, but it certainly must be Done by somebody and I am so far from apologising to the Magistrates, that I should require it, if they did not, as part of the Engagements entered into by my Predecessor and relating to the Rectory.

" If then Sir you have any Desire of finishing the affair and getting all *settled legally and securely* I take the Freedom of expressing my Opinion that you should lose no Time, for People complain very much and I must say with sufficient [cause].

" I am Sir,

" Your obedient servant,

" Geo. Crabbe."

Thomas Timbrell's daughter Caroline, it may be mentioned, later on became the wife of the poet's son, George Crabbe the Younger.

* * *

The troubles in connection with his predecessor are

touched upon again in a letter which Crabbe wrote to the Dean of Lincoln on February 11, 1815 :

" I have obtained nothing of my Predecessor in this Rectory except an honest confession of embarrassments, and it is evident that I must live in unfurnished and even unfloored Rooms or be at the Expence myself, for I am informed the Sum borrowed was exhausted, and this is not the sole Misfortune ; I have indeed by many Efforts and some threatening obtained a promise from the late Sequestrators, that a part of the Sums so inconsiderately paid to Mr. Beresford and his Solicitor shall be accounted for to me, but I must wait long and lose a considerable part of my Dues even then, for though Law might give me a Tithe, it cannot procure my opponents a Fund and whether they will be able to recover the Money so indiscreetly paid, I have much doubt, but I must not claim your Attention to more than the Business immediately before me and in that if you can spare the Time, I shall be very thankful for your Interception.

" I sincerely hope Mr. Gordon and the whole family are in perfect Health and beg to be remembered with much Respect and as One who retains a due Sense of favours, past : The young Lady has probably forgotten me and the young Gentlemen have many other things by this Time to think of.

" I dined on Thursday with Col. Houlton of Farleigh —whom I think you know : there I met Mr. Bowles my Brother Visitor and a Mr. Sweet in whom George and I immediately traced a strong likeness of the Dean of Lincoln and every *one who* had seen the two Gentlemen Agreed to the Opinion. There are indeed dissimilar points but such as politeness could not enter into : He is likewise your Senior I think by some years."

With Colonel Houlton of Farleigh Castle Crabbe was to be on the friendliest terms, frequently visiting at his

beautiful and hospitable place. The Mr. Bowles whom he met there was his poet-neighbour (at some miles distance) William Lisle Bowles. The completion of this letter concerns a romantic episode frequently glanced at in this volume, and will come in more appropriately at a later point.

CHAPTER II

BATH

" Oh ! do not ask the Muse to show
Or how we met, or how we part :
The bliss, the pain, too well I know,
That seize in turn this faithful heart.
That meeting—it was tumult all—
The eye was pleased, the soul was glad ;
But thus to memory I recall,
And feel the parting doubly sad."

To a Lady.

THOUGH Trowbridge was his home, Bath exercised a real fascination over George Crabbe, and here his association with that fascinating watering-place calls for more particular treatment in that it was there that he first met Elizabeth Charter, and it was there too that he made what was a yet more important friendship, that with the family of Hoare. These meetings are touched upon in the following letters, but before coming to them we may pause for a while to contemplate the Bath of about a century ago.

The splendour and fascination of Bath change, but they do not depart—despite the words of those who can see no beauty in that which lacks the enchantment of distance. No longer, even in Crabbe's time, was the aspect of the English Athens quite the same as it had been in the days of the witty autocrat Beau Nash. Already there had come those changes which are

connoted, say, by the different atmospheres of Sheridan's "School for Scandal" and of the novels of Jane Austen; a change perhaps as great as that which has taken place during the past century.

And though we speak of Bath in the eighteenth century as Bath in its heyday, it must be remembered that despite conventions of nomenclature the change from one century to another is in its characteristics as in its characters a gradual transition during years, and not a sudden change in the twinkling of an eye as one century passes and another begins. Thus the eighteenth century was still represented in Bath when George Crabbe moved to its neighbourhood and looked wistfully towards its streets and assemblies, its ever-changing throng of visitors; Mrs. Piozzi (at one time Samuel Johnson's Mrs. Thrale) was living there in her second widowhood, having removed to a "nutshell" at No. 8 Gay Street after the death of Piozzi. She was already a septuagenarian when Crabbe went to Bath and said of herself in a letter to a friend in 1815: "That grave Mr. Lucas brought his son here, that he might see the *first woman in England*—forsooth. So I am now grown one of the curiosities of Bath, it seems, and *one of the Antiquities*." In 1819 Mrs. Piozzi celebrated entry into her eightieth year by giving a great party—at which she led the dancing! Another veteran spending part of each year in Bath was the didactic Hannah More.

In the beginning of the year in which Crabbe took up his new work in the neighbouring town of Trowbridge Mrs. Jordan was acting at Bath for the first time in the character of Clarinda in the "Suspicious Husband," and also as Lady Teazle, though she was nearing the

end of her professional career, making her last appearance on the London stage in the very month in which Crabbe was inducted into the living of Trowbridge.

Though Crabbe does not tell of visits to the Bath theatre, it is quite likely that he attended there when in the city, for he made a point of going to the theatre when visiting London, and got into trouble in his own town of Trowbridge for going to see the performance of some visiting company. That Bath afforded him opportunities of witnessing the acting of many "stars" may be gathered from a list of some of the performances there during the first winter season after his arrival in the neighbourhood. In November there was Grimaldi in pantomime, while before the close of the year there was the first appearance of William Macready, and during the first two months of 1815 that actor appeared in many parts. In April Betty, the Young Roscius who had set all London talking ten years earlier, was performing in a variety of plays. In July Edmund Kean, fresh from his triumph at Drury Lane, was reaping fresh laurels in Bath. A couple of months later and Conway, the recipient of so-called love-letters from Mrs. Piozzi, was the attraction. In 1816 the "stars" included Young (in Macbeth), Charles Kemble, and Incledon, the singer, while in the following year Edmund Kean returned for another season. From which it will be seen that Crabbe had many opportunities of seeing at Bath some of the leading actors of his later time.

* * *

The Masters of Ceremonies at Bath at this period were James King at the New Rooms and Francis John

Guyenette at the old or Lower Rooms, neither of whom has impressed his name upon the place as did the great Beau Nash, most illustrious of their predecessors. The former wore a gold medallion enriched with brilliants, displaying on one side a figure of Minerva, with words "*Decus et Tutamen*" above it and below "*Dulce est in loco desipere,*" while on the reverse was inscribed the proud title "Arbiter Elegantiarum, 30 Oct^r 1777," encircled by a wreath of laurel and palms. Mr. Guyenette's badge was equally ornate, but in the place of Minerva it bore a raised figure of Venus with a golden apple in one hand and a rudder in the other. On the reverse surrounded by laurels were the words "*Arbiter Elegantiarum, Communi consensû.*"

The Editor of the "Improved Bath Guide" gravely observes that "the office of the Master of Ceremonies at Bath is equally honourable and advantageous. Each master has a ball in the winter and spring seasons; and subscription-books lie at their respective assembly-rooms for such of the company as may not be present at the balls, to enter their *golden* compliments in the return for the civilities they receive from the *sovereigns* of Bath."

In the autumn of 1815 one James Heaviside was elected Master of the Ceremonies at the Lower Rooms, and the name was changed to the Kingston Assembly Rooms, while a Mr. Harris was re-elected Master of the Ceremonies to the City Balls and Card Assembly. James King, Master of the Upper Rooms, died in the autumn of 1816, when his place was filled by the election of George Wyke, but much need not be said of them here, for when Crabbe visited Bath it was to enjoy the com-

pany of particular friends staying there, not to join in the round of assemblies and balls. Though it was no doubt the famous round of gaieties that Bath offered as well as its curative waters which drew thither the people whom the poet was glad to meet.

A glance through the journals of the period shows that many were the "fashionable arrivals" and many were the arrangements made for their entertainment during the period in which they were taking the waters. In 1814, earlier than which we need not here consider, besides the ever-changing programmes at theatre and concert-hall—with Mrs. Jordan and Madame Catalini as "stars"—there were balls, card assemblies, masquerades, fancy-dress balls, even children's balls, and incidentally "Grand Celebrations of England's Victories Crowned by a Glorious Peace." Though that "Peace" was to be badly broken a few months later when Napoleon escaped from Elba and the "Hundred Days" followed. Something of the spirit of the entertainments provided may be gathered from the following scraps about a "Ladies' Night" at the Bath Harmonic Society a little before 1814. The Prince of Wales, afterwards King George the Fourth, was Patron of the Society, and the instructions to those attending ran: "The members are desired to wear their Plumes; such as are not supplied may be furnished therewith by applying to the Secretary in the lobby," and we get a hint that the mixed company needed a certain amount of keeping in order, for "it is particularly requested that the company will be pleased to observe silence during the singing, by which the President will be relieved from the disagreeable necessity of calling to order." Incidentally

it may be said that the members of the Harmonic Society wore a garter by particular licence of one of the princes. The special song on this occasion was written by a member of the Society, the Rev. J. Bowen :

"Determin'd the heyday of fashion to follow,
The Paphian Queen wish'd to visit Apollo,
But where he resided she could not well tell,
So directions she begg'd from her friend at Pall Mall.
Derry down.

"Here Venus was deep as a cunning old matron,
For she went to the source, to Apollo's own patron ;
Where she learn'd his address, and was put in the path—
To follow the God—'You must go down to Bath.'
Derry down.

"These tickets Harmonic will point out the places
For yourself and your train of the loves and the graces ;
So let Cupid your post-boy immediately start
And pull up his doves when they get to the Hart.
Derry down.

"Upon your arrival the Muses will meet you,
With an air on his lyre Apollo shall greet you ;
After which they'll conduct you to Beauty's depot,
Where no Sons of Discord are suffer'd to go.
Derry down.

"Then off flew the goddess, on wings of the wind,
And Eurus skipp'd up as a footman behind ;
When she soon got to Bath, where in raptures ador'd
With her train she now graces the thrice happy board.
Derry down."

The Prince of Wales as the Paphian Queen's "friend at Pall Mall" is delicious, while the description of him by the clerical sycophant as patron of Apollo was more flattering to him than to the god. This was one of the styles of verse which Crabbe's influence was to help to destroy ; indeed it must have seemed a bit tawdry even

in the social artificiality of Bath in the early part of the nineteenth century.

* * *

Whether Crabbe belonged to the Bath Harmonic Society it is not now possible to say, but he entered in his diary on August 25, 1814, that he had been " elected of the Reading Society and News Room." The Harmonic Society had been founded by the Bath clergyman already mentioned (Rev. J. Bowen) in 1795, and several clergymen appear to have been included among the " one thousand noblemen and gentlemen " said a few years later to be its members. It was indeed to a member of this Society that Crabbe owed his first introduction to the Hoare family. This was the Rev. Richard Warner (1763–1857), who was for twenty-two years curate of St. James's, Bath.[1] Warner was a very versatile man, satirist, writer of a number of guide-books and other topographical works, and an antiquary of some distinction. He has been described as one of the chief literary ornaments of Bath at the time that Crabbe removed to the neighbourhood. It was no doubt as fellow-clerics that George Crabbe and the versatile Richard Warner first met.

* * *

Richard Warner had already been at Bath for nearly twenty years when Crabbe removed to Trowbridge, and he had already come to be recognised as the leading authority of his time on Bath history. Indeed, in the " Dictionary of National Biography " it is acknowledged

[1] M. Huchon erroneously says that it was Bowles who introduced Crabbe to the Hoares in 1818. See the letter of February 11, 1817, p. 151.

that his " History of Bath " published in 1801 has never been superseded. Warner must have been an interesting person if a somewhat unconventional parson, and it is to be regretted that Crabbe in his characteristic abstention from gossip about people did not tell us more of his friendship with him. On a day of general fasting, May 25, 1804, when a corps of Bath Volunteers formed part of his congregation, Warner preached on the subject of " War inconsistent with Christianity "—an action which sufficiently illustrates his unconventionality, and one which, it is not surprising to learn, caused considerable comment. Much talked about too were his skits and satires published three or four years later over the pen-name of Peter Paul Pallet.

The Bath society portrayed in these satires was much the same as that when Crabbe came on the scene a few years later, and several of the " Bath Characters " delineated in Peter Paul Pallet's book of that name were still living when Crabbe entered upon his duties at Trowbridge—with some of them, indeed, the poet was to become on friendly terms. In the " Bath Characters " Warner satirised under various nicknames a number of the notables of the place, and his brochure caused considerable fluttering of the dovecotes of Bath. Nearly all the nicknames were easily recognisable, and though most of them long since lost their point, one or two that have not done so may be recalled. Richard Brinsley Sheridan appeared as Dick Merryman ; Major Mathews, with whom Sheridan fought his duel over Miss Linley, was Rattle ; while Miss Linley herself was Linnet ; William Lisle Bowles was Bill Sonnet, and Warner himself was made to appear as Sable.

The dialogues are breezily humorous skits on actual people—apparently easily identifiable—hence the much-talked-of little book was so successful that a fresh edition was soon called for, and Warner took the opportunity of retaliating on his critics in a poetical preface to the new issue in which he imagined the "Characters" as meeting in the Pump Room to consider what should be done to the

> "Scribbler vile with saucy quill,
> Whose satires eighty pages fill."

To show how little penitent he was Sable is made to declare that he will

> "Still attack with *honest rage*
> The REIGNING VICES of the age."

* * *

Warner was perhaps a man of over-sportive talents for Crabbe's tastes, but he was an earnest clergyman, and his sermons were described as "models of pulpit eloquence." In the spring of 1817 he gave up his Bath curacy and retired to one of the other livings which he held, that of Great Chalfield in Wiltshire. For a time Warner had been curate at Boldre, near Lymington, in the New Forest, his rector being William Gilpin, to whom an awakening or widening of interest in picturesque scenery was due. Though Gilpin was duly satirised as "Dr. Syntax," it may be said to be in no small measure due to him that the "horrid crags" and "awful mountains" of the generation before came to be better appreciated by the generation after. It was no doubt through Gilpin's influence that Warner became the author of many "Walks," "Excursions," and other topographical books. His versatility was such that the

forty-four of his works given in the "Dictionary of National Biography" include, besides the topographical and satirical ones mentioned, sermons, theological writings, thoughts on duelling, notes on the Waverley Novels, etc.—which sufficiently demonstrates the variety of his interests and the versatility of his talents. Of him personally there seems but little to be recoverable, the only letters of his which we have seen are of so late a date—he lived until 1857—that they come quite beyond the range of Crabbe's association with Bath. From the portrait miniature which we are able to reproduce he appears to have been a lively, somewhat dandified young man.

In the early twenties of the nineteenth century the Assembly Room balls were presided over by the old Countess of Belmore and her sister Bess Caldwell, who appears to have been of the direct lineage of Malaprop, for she is said to have spoken of the "Warming-pan road," meaning Warminster, and bothered her listeners with mention of "Periwinkle and Asparagus," intending Pericles and Aspasia. Her malapropisms are said to have been collected by Sir William Gell into a small volume entitled "Caldwelliana," but that volume has not been traceable.

* * *

If we allow for the difference caused by the coming of the railway, the natural expansion of the town along the Avon Valley and here and there up the hill-sides, the tramways linking up the outlying villages with the centre, and a certain brightening of the shops in accordance with later methods of commercial display—then we

shall find that the Bath of the early part of the twentieth century has changed but little from the Bath of the early nineteenth. The narrow streets about the centre of the town, the broader residential thoroughfares—Pulteney Street and Sydney Place, Gay Street and the Crescent—have altered but little. The invalid carriages—properly Bath chairs—are still to be seen bearing visitors to the Pump Room or the various baths, though where the chairmen stand waiting to-day there may also be seen taxis—affording another illustration of the fact that the changes in the town are mainly changes in means of communication. Now we may get by the Great Western Railway quick trains from London to Bath in less time than in Crabbe's days it would have taken to walk from the Trowbridge parsonage to the watering-place.

There were daily coaches between Trowbridge and Bath, following the road to Bradford-on-Avon and then along the pleasant Avon Valley to Bathford and Batheaston, to which on its north-eastern extension Bath itself has now nearly reached. It must have been a pleasant short drive in the old coaching days, and from Crabbe's letters we may gather that it was a journey which he gladly took when he knew that friends were waiting him in Bath. His usual headquarters in that city were at the old Castle and Ball Inn (now the "Castle"), Northgate Street, where he was within easy reach of the places that seem generally to have been favoured by his friends—Pulteney, Milsom, and Gay Streets.

* * *

"Great Pulteney Street now appears in all its architectural grandeur: the uniformity of the houses; the

extent of the carriage road; the width of the pavements, and its great cleanliness all combine to give Great Pulteney Street that sort of importance and air of quality which every visitor must feel in passing through it." Thus wrote one who wandered about Bath at the time that Crabbe was corresponding with Elizabeth Charter, and the words are no less applicable to this quiet and dignified thoroughfare to-day.

It was at a house in Pulteney Street (No. 11) that Crabbe first met Elizabeth Charter, and the broad street with its tall, straight-fronted, many-windowed houses is to-day much as it was when the meeting took place. Nearly opposite No. 11 is the opening of one of the briefest of thoroughfares, William Street, with a glimpse of the pleasant hills that almost enring Bath. At the top of Pulteney Street is Sydney Place, and the well-wooded pleasance of Sydney Gardens (now cut through by the railway), while at the back of the long row to which No. 11 belongs a new public park has been formed.

Milsom Street, in which Crabbe's friends the Norrises used to sojourn, was the old-time fashionable shopping-street, and retains much of its ancient dignity. In 1819 it was described in one tremendous sentence as being at once "the very magnet of Bath" and "the pulse of it." Milsom Street was indeed the fashionable lounging-place:

> "Some lounge in the bazaars while others meet
> To take a turn or two in Milsom Street."

With congenial friends we may be sure that the poet often took a turn in Milsom Street.

* * *

Trowbridge Church in 1830

The year before George Crabbe removed into the neighbourhood at Trowbridge a writer had said: "A Bath ball, particularly on *Thursday* evenings, calls together these Grandees, as well as multitudes of a lower degree, and displays scenes which would require a pencil as *pointed* as that of Hogarth or Gilray, or a pen as *sharp* as Churchill's or Crabbe's to expose sufficiently." Possibly the poet never saw this compliment, but if he did he never took the hint, for though he felt the attraction of Bath he did not make it the theme of any of his "stern" painting.

It must be mentioned that also within reach of the great social centre of Bath was another parson-poet, William Lisle Bowles, whose position in our literary history is assured as an "influence," though his poetry has long since ceased to be read by any but those who stray into literary by-ways. Canon Bowles was vicar of Bremhill, near Chippenham, a goodly distance north of Trowbridge, while Thomas Moore lived at Sloperton Cottage, near Bowood, the residence of his patron-friend, Lord Lansdowne, and not many miles from Bremhill. Crabbe knew both his fellow-poets, but was perhaps more intimate with Bowles, whom he had probably more frequent opportunities of meeting, as they both held livings within the diocese of Salisbury. Bowles, who is mentioned several times in the following letters, is said to have been the absent-minded clergyman who put down twopence at a turnpike for the horse that he *imagined* he was riding! Shortly after Crabbe moved to Trowbridge Bowles rode over with Lord Lansdowne to call on him, and then probably it was that their warm friendship began.

CHAPTER III

"FEMALE FRIENDS"

"I now was sixty, but could walk and eat;
My food was pleasant and my slumbers sweet;
But what could urge me at a day so late
To think of women?"

Tales of the Hall.

CANON AINGER in his monograph on the poet in the English Men of Letters Series says, apropos of George Crabbe's susceptibility to the charms of female society: "An old squire remarked to a friend in reference to the subject, 'Damme, sir! the very first time Crabbe dined at my house he made love to my sister!' And a lady is known to have complained that on a similar occasion Crabbe had exhibited so much warmth of manner that she 'felt quite frightened.' His son entirely supports the same view as to his father's almost demonstratively affectionate manner towards ladies who interested him, and who, perhaps owing to his rising repute as an author, showed a corresponding interest in the elderly poet." That Crabbe himself admits the "soft impeachment" we saw in that passage from one of his letters with which this volume opens, and indeed of it there is abundant evidence. M. Huchon sums up this amiable weakness by saying that Crabbe was extremely susceptible to the charms of the feminine friendships that

came in his way. He was indeed fond of receiving attentions and responded to such with ready cordiality, and sometimes it may be that that cordiality was taken over-seriously by those to whom or before whom it was shown. His letters to lady friends demonstrate that he was fond of the language of affection even where he did not contemplate love of a warmer kind than that of friendship. The "note" of a kind of formalised exaggerated devotion which obtained in the eighteenth century still survived to some extent. It has indeed become permanently established in ordinary correspondence in our "Dear Sir," addressed to people who are not in any sense dear to us, and our subscription "Yours truly" or "Yours obediently" to people for whom we have no personal feeling, and people whom we should very strongly resent being called upon to obey. This is not to say that Crabbe was not sincere in his friendly, affectionate, and even loving expressions to his fair correspondents. We know that he was at once a kindly and a susceptible man. He was no gay Lothario seeking to make conquests that he might pander to his own vanity, but he was a man fond of quiet social intercourse, and when once the idea of a second marriage had come to him, each lady who, as kindly friend, as clergyman, and as poet made him the recipient of triple homage—flattered him, and fluttered him, and soon, as a latter poet put it, she

> "Blossomed in the light of tender personal regards."

But that the note of exaggerated compliment was more or less habitual with him in his relations with the other sex may be gathered from the words of a lady who said of him as a companion "that the cake was no doubt

very good, but there was too much sugar to cut through in getting at it."

Jane Austen, who was doing in prose fiction such true-to-life work as Crabbe did in poetry, with the irradiating addition of humour, once said that Crabbe was the only man she could have wished to marry. In one of her letters she wrote: "No, I have never seen the death of Mrs. Crabbe. I have only just been making out from one of his prefaces that he probably was married. It is almost ridiculous. Poor woman! I will comfort him as well as I can, but I do not undertake to be good to her children. She had better not leave any."

* * *

It is not perhaps possible to decide who were the particular six female friends Crabbe had in mind as being all very dear to him, and who were, as he naïvely put it, unknown to each other, though four of them, perhaps five, are now identifiable. The one that first calls for mention is a Miss Charlotte Ridout, a lady with regard to whom the facts ascertainable make up in explicitness what they lack in fullness. She appears to have been the friend and confidante of another Charlotte (Miss W——), to whom, though they had never met, after two years of correspondence, Crabbe proposed marriage, only to learn that her part in the epistolary flirtation had not been meant seriously, that she was already engaged and about to be married. That the correspondence begun with the shadowy Charlotte W. was continued with Charlotte Ridout—and to a similar end—is to be learned from Crabbe's somewhat vague

presentation of the story in the second of the following letters to Elizabeth Charter.

It was in June, 1814, that Crabbe took up his residence at Trowbridge. In the following September he was visiting Sidmouth, and there he met—M. Huchon says "again met," but there is no earlier record of their meeting—Charlotte Ridout. With her he had corresponded, and it is possible that the warmth of his expressions won her affection for her elderly correspondent, for he was sixty and she was six-and-twenty —which is nearly double that considerable difference which Aristotle thought that there should be in the ages of husband and wife. In one of the letters to Elizabeth Charter we get a somewhat vague outline of the romance of the poet and his admirer, for it seems that the lady did no inconsiderable part of the wooing—though 1814 was not a leap year. Charlotte Ridout appears to have been thoroughly fascinated by the poet and to have rejected the advances of another suitor nearer her own age, "an excellent match in every respect except a certain weakness of intellect"!

On September 22 Crabbe set out from Trowbridge to meet the lady who had boldly offered to engage herself to him without a meeting, and the progress of his journey and of the romance is indicated in the following passage from his diary for 1814. The words here given in italics are entered in the diary in cipher.

"Sept. 22. Trowbridge—Bath—Wells—Bridgwater —Taunton. Expenses of journey £3 13 6.
Sept. 23. Honiton. Sidmouth. *Mr. Ridout.*
Sept. 26. *Declaration—Acceptance.*"

On September 30 Crabbe was back at Trowbridge, for on that date the entry runs: "Letter Sidmouth sent and received." Then there is a month's silence on the romance, until there comes the following series of entries:

"Nov. 5. Mr. Ridout. Letter from Miss Wylliams.
Nov. 8. *Mr. Ridout went.*
Nov. 14. *To Mr. Ridout.*
Nov. 15. Rec^{d}. from *Charlotte* perse. [*sic* ? purse]
Dec. 14. *Charlotte's picture.*"

After that the poet made no more entries in that year's diary. Canon Ainger and M. Huchon have both given these entries incorrectly, both basing them on Edward FitzGerald's erroneous transcriptions from the diary. Canon Ainger (whom M. Huchon follows) summarises the entries in the following fashion from FitzGerald's notes—all the dates given being wrong, and the words italicised not forming any part of Crabbe's own entries: "'*Sidmouth. Miss Ridout.* Declaration. Acceptance.' But under October 5 was written the ominous word: 'Mr. Ridout.' And later: 'Dec. 12. Charlotte's picture *returned.*'" There was really nothing "ominous" in the words "Mr. Ridout," they evidently noted the arrival of Charlotte's father as a guest at the Trowbridge rectory, and in the original there is nothing about Charlotte's picture being "returned," though it is open to conjecture that such is the meaning of the entry.

The widower's traditional year of mourning, it may be mentioned, was less than a week overpast. That the poet is ever young, as has been said, may be seen in

the ardent lines "To a Lady on Leaving her at Sidmouth":

> "Yes! I must go—it is a part
> That cruel Fortune has assigned me,—
> Must go, and leave, with aching heart,
> What most that heart adores behind me. . . .
>
> "Then shall we meet, and, heart to heart,
> Lament that fate such friends should sever,
> And I shall say—'We must not part';
> And thou wilt answer—'Never, never!'"

The closing words must have had a curiously ironical ring to the poet if he looked at them again after the lapse of a few short weeks.

Miss Ridout's family, it may be guessed, did not altogether approve of the contemplated union of January and May, and the engagement, it is seen, was not long continued. It would appear that Crabbe himself was the breaker-off of the contemplated match, though we are unable to do more than guess at his reasons. Fear of leaving a young widow inadequately provided for seems to have weighed with him somewhat; it may be that he found the lady who as correspondent had charmed him, as companion appeared more incompatible; or it may well be that Charlotte's family had brought pressure to bear and thus led up to the breaking of the engagement. At any rate, the short romance soon came to an end, and the poet was left to reconcile himself to his solitary life or to look elsewhere for a second mate. As is to be seen again and again in the following letters, Crabbe long had his little affair with Charlotte Ridout on his conscience. Concluding his letter of February 11, 1815, to the Dean of Lincoln,

already quoted in part, Crabbe summed up the episode thus :

" I know not whether in one of my Letters I did not give some Intimation of a Design I had entertained of making my too-large House less solitary and there was a Lady, somewhat too young indeed, who had the Courage to offer her Assistance : She is really a very pleasant, sensible and good young lady and one of those who has honoured me by her Letters for some two years past : I was astonished by her Readiness to give up so much to a Man as old as her Father and the more because I made out upon fair, honest Enquiry, that she rejected the proposal of a youth elegible in every Respect, except a certain Degree of Weakness in his Intellect. I have never had such Call for Self-Denial and even yet almost doubt my Victory : yet I am afraid prudence and Inclination are not on One side and in this Fear I remain Solitary, but free—and am my dear Sir Your very obliged and obedient GEO. CRABBE."

In a letter that has been elsewhere published, written to his friend Mrs. Houlton in 1819, he said : " Miss Long tells me that a certain young lady whom I once saw at Sidmouth, and had some idea that I might see at Trowbridge, is still with her aunt Floyd, and I hope as happy as an aunt can make her."

Mr. Ridout died at Sidmouth on October 21, 1817, and from an obituary notice in the " Gentleman's Magazine " we learn that Charlotte Ridout predeceased Crabbe by just two months : " 1831. Dec. 6. At the New Inn, Stowe, Bucks, Charlotte, second daughter of the late John Christopher Ridout, Esq. of Baughurst House, Hants, and niece of the late General Sir John Floyd, Bart."

* * *

It appears to have been regarded by his friends and even by his family as highly probable that Crabbe would remarry after he had settled down in his new living. There can be no doubt that some knowledge of the brief Ridout romance became known, and when it came to an end local gossip was not long in seeking for another fair one as possible mistress of the Rectory.

On the very night of his first arrival in Trowbridge Crabbe had been, as has been mentioned, warmly welcomed by the Waldron family. Mr. Waldron was a banker, and his daughter's name appears to have been again and again associated with that of the new rector, but, if we may hazard the surmise, without any justification. For the Waldrons Crabbe had the warmest feelings of friendship, with them he went on holiday jaunts, and in their house he seems to have experienced the best companionship that Trowbridge could afford him. From his letters to Elizabeth Charter, however, we may gather that his friendship with Maria Waldron was never anything more than friendship.

* * *

Another of George Crabbe's young unmarried friends made after he removed to Trowbridge was Miss Sarah Hoare, daughter of the well-known banker Samuel Hoare. M. Huchon says that it was at Bath "through Bowles" that Crabbe "made the acquaintance of the Hoares about the year 1818." From one of the letters herein we learn that it was in 1816 that Crabbe first met the Hoares, and that his introducer was not his fellow poet-clergyman, but the Rev. Richard Warner of Bath, Mrs. Hoare having asked Mr. Warner to

make her acquainted with George Crabbe. The new acquaintance soon ripened into warm friendship, and Crabbe frequently stayed at the Hoares' residence in Hampstead when he was in London, and visited them at their country place near Cromer. With the Hoares he maintained a long and friendly correspondence, and it is not fanciful to see in the banker's daughter one of the six female friends who were very dear to him in 1816. Whether many of his letters to the Hoares are still in existence it is not possible to say. Some of them will be found in one of the later chapters of this volume. After his death Sarah Hoare wrote much to the poet's son and biographer about his friendship, and even herself wrote a memoir with the object of its anonymous appearance affixed to a selection of Crabbe's poems. She would not have her name appear in the matter at all, and it seems from the correspondence that her memoir was finally given to the biographer to incorporate as he chose in his own work.

* * *

A letter and its reply may be given here as indicating the fascination which Crabbe seems to have possessed for sentimental young ladies. Who the " Fanny " was, whence she wrote, or in what year, cannot be ascertained, but that there had been earlier correspondence is seen from the lady's opening words :

" Your kind note, My dear Mr. Crabbe, gives me the greatest pleasure—and I find myself highly honoured by the very kind expressions it contains, but I have not the least doubt—

" but I am astonished that you should mention your age—you must supose [*sic*] me to be very childish or

what is worse very weak.—No, Mr. Crabbe—I honor and revere age—most especially as you are entirely free from all the disagreeable qualities mostly atendant [*sic*] upon Age, such as ill Humour and etc. etc. etc. and give me leave to say without flattery, that I never saw a young man of more amiable or pleasing manners than yours—though it would be rather dangerous for me if I should.

"I have trespassed upon your time, you I trust will excuse it as I daresay this will be my last and now D[r]. Mr. Crabbe I conclude with my best wishes for your Hapiness [*sic*] in this life and I hope [line cut away] many years add to your present number—and when you resign this life may angels guide you to your destined home and believe me, I remain yours most truly

"F. F."

On this Crabbe has written a copy of his reply:

"My dear Miss F. Your note affects me. I do not think that I rightly understood you. You kindly overlook my age but I cannot. If the regard and kind wishes as well as remembrances of such a man can be in any degree gratifying to you, this I can promise. You flatter me by the opinion you express. I certainly do not think that age makes itself respectable by ill nature and I believe neither man nor woman is the worse for being agreeable but still my dear Fanny there must be many defects in the aged which no lightness of spirits can make up. Of this we will not dispute. I once more thank you and assure you of my kindest regards and am affectionately yours

"G. C.

"I know not whether you have any connections at Bath; where I frequently am. If at any time I can be of use direct to Rev[d] G[eorge] C[rabbe], T[rowbridge] Wilts."

M. Huchon suggests that "Fanny" was one of Crabbe's Muston parishioners who hoped to succeed to the position of mistress of the poet's parsonage rendered vacant by "Mira's" death, but this is a mere hypothetical assumption.

* * *

One other of Crabbe's female friends may be referred to here, though she is not mentioned in the letters to Elizabeth Charter. This was Mary Leadbeater, daughter of Edmund Burke's schoolmaster-friend, Richard Shackleton. She had met the poet in June, 1784, at Burke's house when she was a child and he a young East Anglian first seeking to make his way in literature. Mary Shackleton, long since become Mary Leadbeater, wrote to Crabbe in the autumn of 1816 from Ireland, and reminded him of their earlier encounter and of how "my dear father told thee that Goldsmith's would now be the *deserted* village." From this until the end of her life the kindly Quakeress, whose "Cottage Dialogues" delighted our great-grandparents, and George Crabbe kept up a friendly correspondence.

Replying to her first letter, Crabbe also recalled their meeting six-and-thirty years earlier, when she was "not Leadbeater then, but a pretty demure lass, standing a timid auditor, while her own verses were read by a kind friend, but keen judge, Edmund Burke." He went on with a warmth of friendliness that is of itself an indication of his ever-ready expansiveness on receiving any cordiality:

"I dwell in the parsonage of a busy, populous, clothing town, sent thither by ambition and the Duke

of Rutland. . . . Know you aught of a family Allot? —the master of it Dean of Raphoe. There is a daughter there I am much disposed to love, and I believe she is not much indisposed to return my affection. Age has some convenience, you find: one can profess love, and feel it, too, without that attendant apprehension which young people have. Now this, construed fairly, is merely a preface to the question, will you permit me to love you?"

Mrs. Leadbeater, commenting on this, said with some readiness: "In thy partiality for female society I think I discern the resemblance to dear Cowper, our other moral poet, but enlivened by that flow of cheerfulness which he so sadly wanted."

Canon Ainger neatly summed up this characteristic of Crabbe's by saying: "On the whole, however, Crabbe maybe found, when these fascinating experiences were over, that there had been safety in a multitude. For he seems to have been equally charmed with Roger's sister, and William Spencer's daughter, and the Countess of Bessborough, and a certain Mrs. Wilson—and, like Miss Snevellicci's papa, to have 'loved them every one.'"

CHAPTER IV

ELIZABETH CHARTER

"A lovely creature! not more fair than good,
By all admired, by some, it seems, pursued."
Tales of the Hall.

OF Elizabeth Charter, the lady with whom Crabbe was to become a regular correspondent, and for whom he was to give evidence of a real *tendresse*, there is but little biographical data recoverable. She was a daughter of Thomas Charter (1741–1810) of Lynchfield House, Lydeard, near Taunton, by his wife Elizabeth Malet (1749–1804), daughter of the Rev. Alexander Malet, rector of Combe Florey—that "flowery valley" in the rectorship of which he was, after fifteen years, followed by the witty Sydney Smith.

Thomas Charter had several children, some of whom died young, and of whom only Elizabeth, who was born in 1782, and her youngest sister, Emma Frances, born a year later, concern us here.[1] Emma Frances became the wife of Lieut.-Colonel (afterwards General) Peachey,[2]

[1] Thomas Charter's son Thomas Malet Charter (1781–1836) was the father of Ellis James Charter (*d.* 1901), who was Elizabeth Charter's executor and father of Miss Fanny Laura Elizabeth Charter, to whom acknowledgments of our indebtedness are expressed in the preface.

[2] [Sept. 12, 1803] "Lieut.-Col. Peachey, late M.P. for Yarmouth, to Emma Frances, youngest daughter of Thomas Charter, Esq., of Lynchfield House."

and died of consumption at Madeira on March 2, 1809. Verses in memory of her by William Lisle Bowles, Robert Southey, and others will be found in another chapter.

Elizabeth Charter's uncle, Charles Warre Malet of Wilbury, filled high positions in the East India Company's service, became a Fellow of the Royal Society, and was created a baronet in 1791. Eight years later he married Susanna Wales—the Lady Malet of Crabbe's correspondence, and Elizabeth Charter's aunt by marriage. Another of the daughters of the Rev. Alexander Malet married Colonel William Dansey, C.B., of Brinsop Court, Hereford, who was Commander at St. Domingo, and died in 1795, and became mother of the " bold Captain Dansey " whom we meet in later chapters—Elizabeth Charter's first cousin.

The home of the Malets was Wilbury Park, situated about ten miles to the north-east of Salisbury on the borders of Wiltshire and Hampshire, and Wilbury House, where Elizabeth Charter frequently stayed, and where on one much-discussed occasion George Crabbe visited her, is notable as one of the earliest of Italian-style mansions in this country, being of Jacobean date.

Elizabeth Charter's brother, T. M. Charter, was lord of the manor of Seaton, at the mouth of the River Axe —between Lyme and Sidmouth on the Devon coast, and there are references to the family in a poem published in 1835 by the Rev. J. B. Smith : " Seaton Beach, a Poem, descriptive of various phenomena of the ocean and a summer spent by the seaside, with characters sketched from life and notes illustrative of the life of the shore." From the notes we learn that " a fine

collection of the best specimens of these gems of the beach (beach-pebbles, 'relics of a world Once whelm'd by waters and in ruins hurl'd'), found by herself, and polished at considerable expense under her direction adorns the cabinet of the lady of T. M. Charter Esq^re Lord of the Manor of Seaton, and exhibits among many other instances conspicuous proof of her elegant taste in this ornamental department of nature." The poem, which is prefaced by a motto from Crabbe, pays tribute to Charter's work in draining the place and driving away the agues, while a note pointed out that he had raised "an obscure hamlet into the rank of a fashionable watering-place."

* * *

As Lady Malet is frequently referred to in Crabbe's correspondence it may not be uninteresting to copy here Elizabeth Charter's tribute to the memory of Sir Charles Malet. It is entitled in her album "Lines on the death of my dear Uncle, Jany, 1815."

"Why mourns my heart ? is it for thee, blest shade
Who art to happiness supreme convey'd
And far removed from this poor shadowy vale
Art tasting bliss and joys that never fail ?
Yes, 'tis for thee, dear Saint, these sighs ascend,
My more than Parent and my more than Friend.
I know how vain the sigh, how vain the tear,
How vain the wish that would recall thee here,
But no less vain my efforts to controul
This grief of heart, this sickness of the soul ;
Yet thro' the cloud of overwhelming grief
If there's a ray of comfort—some relief,
It is that thy dear breast escapes the woe
So keenly felt by all thy friends below.
'Tis the sweet hope that, every trial o'er,
We all shall meet in heaven to part no more !

"I thought, dear Excellence! that while on earth
Above all others I esteemed thy worth,
But now thou'rt gone to a far distant shore,
I think I may have prized and loved thee more;
In vain I look around in hopes to find
Another mortal with thy noble mind,
Endowed with mental qualities like thine,
In public or in private formed to shine,
Who from the dawning of thy earliest day,
Wert never known from Virtue's path to stray.
'The soul of honour'[1]—to thy country true,
Forgetting in her weal each selfish view,
Or if she bled, by Enemies opprest,
Thy patriot bosom never could find rest.
To all around thee ever good and kind,
Of manners polished, and a taste refin'd,
And oh! above the little tricks of art
Possessed that noblest gift—a feeling heart.
Yes, such thou wert, and tho' thy spotless name
May ne'er be sounded by the trump of fame,
Thy virtuous deeds are registered in heaven,
And meet the high reward to merit given.
Would thou wert here—or I could follow thee
To the blest regions of Eternity!—
But cease thy murmuring, oh, my spirit, cease,
And turn to him whose every path is peace,
To him who promises the weary rest,
And says to those who mourn, 'Ye shall be blest.'
To Him who gives and Him who takes away,
Let me devoutly, let me humbly pray,
That whether he vouchsafes me good or ill,
I yet may be submissive to his will,
Thro' him be blest with a contented mind,
Grateful when happy, and in grief resign'd.
For will not those who with attention look,
And read, and mark, learn from his holy book,
That those of contrite heart he best approves,
And most he chastens those whom most he loves?
Oh! words of comfort, let me kiss the rod
And even for my sorrows learn to thank my God!"

[1] "'He is the very soul of Honor,' was an expression used by the late venerable and respectable Sir Wm. Meadows in speaking of my beloved uncle." [E. C.]

The lines may show no great inspiration, but they help us to realise the personality of their author. It is possible that the writer of them had already met Crabbe—though his first letter to her is dated about three months later—and her own ability in the way of versifying would probably serve to awaken her interest in the distinguished poet.

* * *

The extent to which people could drop into verse seems considerable when we examine some old albums of the time. Elizabeth Charter herself, her aunt Lady Malet, her cousins Sir Alexander Malet and Captain Charles Dansey, are all represented in Miss Charter's album, if not with poetic distinction, at least with something of cultured ease.

Sir Alexander Malet, the second baronet, was evidently the "A. M." of the album, and one of his pieces may be quoted as containing a chronicle of an octet of brothers. It is entitled "To my dearest Mother on her birthday, accidentally discovered to be so at the breakfast table, July 3rd, 1820":

"Beloved Mother! many a sun hath shone
Sacred as this to me, but erst unknown;
Chance told it, and affection bids the lay
Of filial love and duty hail the day.—

"When half the Parent light in night was lost
Dark was the cloud that our horizon crost,
But still when darkest frown'd that midnight gloom,
And o'er us spread the Shadows of the Tomb,
Time and its light those deeper shades dispell'd,
Almost our griefs and all our sorrows quell'd.
No flattery this, such truths I love to tell—
That this is truth who know thee know full well.
A mother's love in you with judgment join'd

Trowbridge Church—Interior

(As it was 1814–1832.)

And manly firmness with a female mind.
But stay and let a Brother's love count o'er
The names of those their common mother bore.
First Charles![1] ah, much belov'd, thou'rt far away,
Where Phœbus firier sheds his eastern ray
On honour's road you fare, where Ganges wide
Rolls to the distant flood his mighty tide,
Yet there the same affections rule his soul
Which when he left us bade the teardrop roll.
And oft I ween his thoughts to England veer,
And home and Mother claim a silent tear.
Him Wyndham,[2] George,[3] and Arthur[4] follow there,
These trained in arts of peace and this in war.
Behold the Eastern Star which guides to fame,
The glory which surrounds your Father's name.
Hugh[5] follows where his mother points the track,
Octavius[6] sometime clad in sober black
Will war against the follies of the age.
Thy name is placed the last upon the page,
Dear youngest Alfred,[7] little darling boy,
Thy mother's latest hope, thy mother's joy,
Such be they all—to thee their ranks are due,
If otherwise, themselves the fault shall rue.
May each one's virtue form a radiant gem
To grace their Parents' heavenly Diadem,
Then shall my prayer be granted, it is this,
May each returning year increase thy bliss,
Each natal year behold thy happiness."

Lady Malet, it may be said, lived until 1868—long enough to see all of her many sons distinguish themselves. The distinguished diplomatist the late Sir Edward Baldwin Malet (1837–1908) was a younger son of the second baronet, and was thus Elizabeth Charter's first cousin once removed.

* * *

[1] Afterwards Col. Charles St. Loe Malet, *d.* 1889.
[2] William Wyndham Malet, afterwards vicar of Ardsley, Herts, *d.* 1885.
[3] Afterwards Col. George Grenville Malet, killed at Bushire, 1856.
[4] Afterwards member of Council, Bombay.
[5] Hugh Poyntz Malet, E.I.C.C.S.
[6] Octavius Warre Malet, E.I.C.C.S., *d.* 1891.
[7] Captain Alfred Augustus Malet, *d.* 1898.

To return to Lady Malet's niece. Elizabeth Charter can have been little, if any, younger than her aunt, with whom she seems to have maintained the close friendship of contemporaries rather than the relationship of aunt and niece. As we see in the letters, she frequently stayed at Wilbury House, the seat of the Malets, the heir to which was Sir Alexander, still a lad in his teens.

It was in Bath that Elizabeth Charter and George Crabbe met at the house at which the former's brother-in-law stayed when in Bath, 11 Pulteney Street, probably at a date but little earlier than that of the first of the following letters, and the poet seems at once to have fallen, or fancied himself, a victim to the charms of the lady—he being then in his sixty-second year, and she about thirty-four. Of their meetings, apart from those indicated in the letters, we have no particulars, but that Elizabeth was teased by her family and friends over the devotion of her poet is to be gathered from a series of verses in her own album.

First come the following "Lines from Mr. Crabbe on my asking him for an autograph to add to a collection":

"Behold, dear Lady, thy commands obey'd.
Accept this tribute of a mind decay'd,
And with those happier candidates for fame
Place thou this idle verse, this humble name:
Where Southey is, and Scott would gladly be,
It sure were honor to be placed by thee.
But hast thou not beside a favour'd race
To whom not fame but friendship gives the place?
Known to the heart, and made, by many a year
And many an act of love and duty, dear?
Yes, such must be, and oh that fate would give
The choice to me—live where thou lov'st to live,
Then may that fame the varying times allow,

Sought as a means and found I know not how,
Forever perish to the world unknown,
Here might I live, and call this lot my own,
For in that change how happy must he prove
Whose fame gains friendship and whose name buys love."

* * *

It might well be thought by the recipient that these lines were a little ambiguous. It may be that the writer intended them as a declaration, and had Elizabeth Charter been as responsive as some of his fair correspondents she might quickly have occupied the position to which Charlotte Ridout had aspired. Unfortunately, however, we know nothing of Elizabeth Charter's letter to Crabbe—she is not so much as mentioned in the memoir of the poet by his son, though it is possible that she is glanced at in the passage where it is said " that, on one occasion, at least, my brother and myself looked with sincere pleasure to the prospect of seeing our father's happiness increased by a new alliance." It is, however, more probable that those words refer to the Charlotte Ridout episode.

Elizabeth Charter's circle evidently rallied her on her " conquest," for Crabbe's lines are immediately succeeded in the album by the following : " On Elizabeth Charter's receiving some lines from Mr. Crabbe " :

" You say that the lines are obscure, my dear Bess,
Whilst I plainly perceive 'tis no more nor no less
Than an offer of marriage—for says he not so
That fortune and fame he would gladly forego
And to live where you live would esteem himself blest.
Your love, too ! could anything more be express'd ?
Yet why should he quarrel with fortune or fame,
Tho' you he should wed he may keep them the same,
For the tender caresses these ladies bestow

Seldom cause, I believe, matrimonial woe.
Then put, if you please, his kind words to the test,
And let Crabbe above all other mortals be blest,
For whose lot in this world his own would not barter
For fortune and fame and Elizabeth Charter ?"

* * *

These lines are followed by another pleasantry on the same theme, possibly written by Elizabeth's cousin, Sir Alexander Malet—"A new Ballad on a late interesting event":

"There is a man of age sedate
But still secure to captivate,
Or Duchess, Dame, or Drab,
If but the last had taste to read,
For that were requisite indeed,
Since he's the poet Crabbe !

"But this aspiring man to vex
The feelings of the softer sex
And all their hopes to stab
Dares for celestial Nymphs to burn
[1]A goddess now must serve his turn,
Oh ! thou ambitious Crabbe !

"In vain in prose both clear and strong
(Olympic prints declare) e'er long
The swain his flame did blab,
He wrote a soul-subduing Letter,—
Yes, yes, few men could write a better,
We own, sagacious Crabbe !

"The Goddess fair at night's approach
Felt on her lips the fairy coach
Whipp'd on by wondrous Mab.
We will not say what dream'd she then,
But only hint the bets were ten
To one on thee, oh Crabbe !

[1] "Alluding to the name of Minerva given me by the author and his brother." [E. C.]

"From cloud-borne couch she early stirr'd
And from the wing of Jove's own bird
A quill presumed to nab,
With which a pen was form'd to write
Such greetings as distracted quite
With joy, poor mortal Crabbe!

"There is a tree both fair and tall
Which tawny sons of India call
The life-supporting Brab.
Gay, green, and vig'rous as that tree
Shall now Bath streets exhibit thee,
O great, all-conqu'ring Crabbe!"

* * *

Of the personality of Elizabeth Charter we can learn little beyond such of it as may be gathered from her album, from the tone of the letters addressed to her by Crabbe, and from the simple statement that she was "a very clever and well-educated woman, greatly loved by her relations." A certain winsomeness and simplicity of character seem to be indicated by a letter which she wrote as an old woman in view of the near approach of death; a letter which will more appropriately come at the close of this volume.[1]

Here we are concerned with the friendship—that might, it would seem, have ripened into a more intimate relationship—of Elizabeth Charter and George Crabbe, but it must be added that according to her family tradition she had received a proposal from Robert Southey. It is possible that family tradition at some time or another confused the two poets, for Southey first married in 1795, his wife died in October, 1837, and he married Caroline Bowles about eighteen months later. It may be—but appears very unlikely to those

[1] See last chapter.

who have studied the life of Southey—that a proposal to Elizabeth Charter preceded that to Caroline Bowles. What is certain is that they were friends of many years' standing—the fact is attested in a long series of letters which Southey wrote to General Peachey, who, as has been pointed out, married Elizabeth Charter's sister.

CHAPTER V

AN OLD ALBUM

"Read, but with partial mind, the themes I choose:
A friend transcribes, and let a friend peruse:
This shall a charm to every verse impart,
And the cold line shall reach the willing heart:
For willing hearts the tamest song approve,
All read with pleasure when they read with love."

To a Lady.

A TREASURED relic of Elizabeth Charter is an album into which she copied a few verses that especially appealed to her, a number of pieces written by herself and members of her family. The keeping of albums was a fashion of the time, and into her album she put verses which she and others had written for the albums of others—notably those of Edith Southey and Sara Coleridge. She seems, indeed, to have been on a particularly friendly footing with the family of the Poet Laureate—a friendship that may possibly have dated from the time when the Lake poets were living in Somersetshire. Of this intercourse—beyond a bare mention of Southey in one of the letters—these album verses appear to be the only evidence.

Elizabeth Charter's manuscript book is entitled in the old ornate fashion "A Poetical Bouquet culled from the Flower Garden of Apollo by the Hand of Taste." On the back of the title are the following lines

signed "T. M." The signature suggests Thomas Moore, and the verses are somewhat in his manner, but they may have been written by the donor of the book—for, as the correspondence shows, Elizabeth Charter did not know Moore personally. It is, however, possible that the verses were the scrap of Moore's writing which Crabbe hoped to obtain for her, and were put in their appropriate position long after the book had been begun :

"Simplicity, young fair sweet Maid,
By fancy led, o'er Pindus stray'd,
Trip'd lightly gazing round or stop'd
And many a fair sweet flow'ret crop'd,
Then taking on the turf her seat
Formed those she deemed most fair, most sweet,
Into this Garland—fondly graced
By the approving smile of Taste,
By Sensibility's rapt gaze,
And Truth's warm, not unwelcome, praise :
While pleasure Virtue gives to thee
This chaplet of Simplicity. T. M."

* * *

We have seen that it was at General Peachey's house in Bath that Elizabeth Charter and George Crabbe met, and that General Peachey's first wife was a sister of Elizabeth Charter. The first pieces copied into the album are memorial stanzas by William Lisle Bowles and Robert Southey "To the Memory of Emma Frances Peachey, who died at the island of Madeira, 1809." Southey's poem, though with considerable alterations, was included in his collected works. The lines by Bowles —"genius of the sacred fountain of tears," as Charles Lamb has termed him in a letter to Coleridge—may

be quoted as an example of the elegiac verse of the time:

"E. F. P.
æt 25
1809

"How mournful, as she sunk resigned and meek,
Sat the last smile upon her pallid cheek.
With languid hope she left her native land,
And faintly woo'd the Southern Breezes bland
To steal reviving o'er her stricken breast
And slow consumption's wasting hand arrest;
Alas! They seem'd around her as they flew
Only to bid a long and last adieu,
Whilst these lov'd Hills sunk in the farthest haze
And ocean roll'd beneath her pensive gaze.
So droop'd, so died, poor Emma —! O'er her grave
Far off the Forests of Madeira wave,
But sad remembrance and affection cry
As round these scenes they cast an aching eye,
'Tho' her fair form in distant earth is laid
Beneath the mountain Palm, or Citron's shade,
Her work, her deeds, her Charities live here.'
Religion answers, smiling through a tear,
'Here! not in yonder realms of light above,
Where Seraphs greet her with a sister's love.'

"W. L. Bowles."

There follow some indifferent blank-verse lines on the same melancholy theme, evidently by Elizabeth Charter herself, beginning:

"Can I forget this treasure of my soul,
A Sister's tenderness, an eye that beamed
With love, a brow that never knew a frown,
Nor a harsh word her tongue?"

* * *

It is not necessary to go through all the contents of the volume, for several of the poems are without any reference to the people with whom we are here concerned,

and others are printed in the works of their authors—Byron, Southey, Moore, etc. "Lines written by [Charles James] Fox on his 50th Birthday to his Wife" may be known, but will bear repeating:

> "Of years I have now half a century past,
> And none of the fifty so blest as the last.
> How it happens my troubles thus daily should cease,
> And my happiness thus with my years should increase,
> This defiance of Nature's most general laws,
> You alone can explain who alone are the cause."

After citing that perfect compliment to her sex it was scarcely kind of Elizabeth Charter to place only a few pages afterwards the following stinging epigram on the writer of the compliment:

> "Britannia's boast, her glory and her pride,
> Pitt, in his country's service lived and died.
> Firmly resolved for once like Pitt to do,
> For once to serve his country—Fox died too!"

* * *

Lines on "A Dormouse found drowned in a Bason of Water" and similar trifles are followed by some pieces of a sterner note.

Lord Byron's "apostrophic hymn" has enshrined something of the opposition which was aroused by the introduction of the waltz into English society, and Sheridan also had his fling at the new dance when he wrote of the time:

> "Ere yet the devil, with practice foul and false,
> Turn'd their poor heads, and taught them how to waltz."

In Elizabeth Charter's book we find a lady writing with no less emphasis—and scarcely less suggestiveness

—on the same subject. This was one Emily Shuldham, and her "Lines on seeing a couple Waltzing" are as follows:

"No matter how, but the Devil was told
That cards are now only play'd by the old,
And much he fear'd if the young should die
Perchance they might pass his kingdom by.
So puffing and blowing to earth he went
And his way to a large Assembly bent;
And when the tables deserted he found
With a horrible groan he twisted round,
But in turning about he luckily chanced
To see where the youngest company danced,
And a beautiful Waltz being just begun
With a jump he cried, 'My object's won—
For the end of a Waltz must surely be
A couple of subjects more for me.'
So he clapped his hands both loud and well,
And wagging his tail return'd to Hell." [1]

Emily Shuldham was probably a niece of that Admiral Shuldham who after varied service was created Baron Shuldham in the peerage of Ireland, and died in 1798.

[1] A curious illustration of the way in which history repeats itself is to be seen here. It was in 1813 that Byron published his attack on "the Waltz"—"the only dance which teaches girls to think," as he said in *Don Juan*—and now in 1913 the waltz is regarded as the dance of propriety, the reign of which is threatened by the "exotic antics" of the two-step. The following are some passages from a letter which appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* on February 2 of the present year: "A short time since I read in your columns that 'happily dances with vulgar names achieve no success in this country, the grace of the waltz is still with us, and its sway will continue, since the Queen is a keen lover of waltzing.' This is certainly true as regards the more refined circles of society, but it is also, unfortunately, true that a most determined effort is being made in other circles to introduce a style of dancing which those who have the interests of our young people at heart would do well not to ignore. . . . There is no need to describe in detail the unwholesome styles introduced by some of the dancers. It was the very antithesis of joyous, healthy dancing. A subtle atmosphere of indelicacy pervaded the whole performance. The manner in which the couples swayed and wriggled round the room, their feeble cat-like movements, were a neurotic parody of an exhilarating recreation."

For a time he was a Member of Parliament for Fowey, but went on service again as commander-in-chief on the Newfoundland station during the early part of the American War of Independence. Later he was for five years port admiral at Plymouth. Other verses of Emily Shuldham's seem to have been inspired by an earlier craze for the game which but a few years ago was widely popular as "Diabolo," for they are entitled "Lines written by Emily Shuldham and sent with a present of a Devil on two sticks (a game now, 1811, much in vogue) to the Brickdales of Stoodleigh who had broken theirs, and of whom she had won the preceding ev^g at Loo." It is not necessary to quote the lines, which turn largely on a compliment to the friends at Stoodleigh ; and matter more interesting immediately follows.

* * *

A quatrain which Byron wrote in the travellers' book at Orchomenus is familiar owing to the epigrammatic neatness of its closing line, but a page of Elizabeth Charter's book shows us that the noble poet was not allowed to have the last word, and also shows that the lines which occasioned his retort were inspired by the fact that he was one who—not content with writing his name in the book of fame—had joined himself with those who scribble on walls ! The page may be quoted in its entirety :

"Lines occasioned by seeing a number of English names written on the wall of a public room at Athens, a practice much deprecated by the Author and his companions :

> "Fair Albion smiling sees each son depart
> To trace the birth and origin of Art.
> Glorious his object ! Noble is his aim !
> He comes to Athens, and he—writes his name ! "

"Answer by Lord Byron, whose name was among the list:

"This modest Bard, like many a Bard unknown,
Rhymes on our names, but wisely hides his own;
But yet, whoe'er he be, to say no worse,
His name would bring more credit than his verse."

Rejoinder:

"Is this the Bard, and these the luckless Lays
That can your Lordship's Indignation raise?
Can they be those which lately you admired,[1]
And which in prose a Compliment inspired?
If it be so, my Lord, to say no worse,
I like your prose much better than your verse."

The "Rejoinder" adds a new interest to the familiar epigram.

* * *

The album contains a yet more notable addition to Byroniana in the form of a set of verses by him that are not to be found in his collected works, verses that cannot rank with his best, but which have a kind of cynical interest when it is recalled that the writing of them was after a short interval followed by the parting of the "two souls."

"TO JESSY, BY LORD BYRON.

"THE FOLLOWING UNPUBLISHED STANZAS WERE ADDRESSED BY LORD BYRON TO HIS WIFE A FEW MONTHS BEFORE THEIR SEPARATION:

"There is a mystic thread of life
So dearly wreath'd with mine alone
That destiny's relentless knife
At once must sever *both* or *none*.

[1] Lord B. was heard to say the lines were good. "This little poetical squabble led to a very pleasant intercourse between the parties in the course of their Tour thro' Greece." [E. C.]

"There is a *form* on which these eyes
Have often gazed with fond delight—
By day that form their joy supplies,
And dreams restore it through the night.

"There is a *voice* whose tones inspire
Such thrills of rapture in my breast—
I would not hear a seraph choir
Unless that voice could join the rest.

"There is a *face* whose blushes tell
Affection's tale upon the cheek—
But pallid at one fond farewell,
Proclaims more love than words can speak.

"There is a *lip* which mine hath prest,
And none had ever prest before,
It vowed to make me sweetly blest,
And mine—mine only prest it more.

"There is a *bosom*—all my own—
Hath pillowed oft this aching head,
A *mouth* which smiles on me alone,
An *eye* whose tears with mine are shed.

"There are two *hearts* whose movements thrill
In unison so closely sweet;
That, pulse to pulse responsive still,
They both must heave—or cease to beat.

"There are two *souls* whose equal flow
In gentle streams so calmly run,
That when they part—they part!—ah, no!
They cannot part—those souls are one!"

* * *

"A poetical letter from Charles Dansey to his Sister in consequence of a wish express'd by certain members of his Family that he had been brought up behind the Counter or anything rather than the Army, to be so continually exposed to danger:

" So long 'midst the troubles of War I have been
That I'm fully resolved upon changing the scene.
I mean to turn Merchant, and thus I'll begin
By retailing red Herrings and glasses of Gin ;
For I hold it a maxim too true to despise
To begin at the bottom's the best way to rise.
And the *Mercantile line* I am sure I shall top
By at first setting up in a neat little shop.
So to you and Aunt Peggy I send this request
To make such preparations as you may think best,
And execute, pray, without diff'rence or strife
A task so allied with my welfare in Life.
Find out a convenient appropriate dwelling
For the Buyers to buy and the Sellers to sell in.
Let the shop be well fitted for holding my store,
And seen from the Parlour, mind, thro' a glass door.
A sly passage construct to the Lane, too, behind,
For you know every Huckster's to smuggling inclined ;
And then, whilst my Shop-boy politely in front
Of each Customer asks, What d'ye please, Ma'am, to want ?
Tea, Coffee and Cards, and Lace and French Brandy,
I'll take in behind at my back door so handy.
For the Ladies of Taunton all make the confession
That a little *Fair Trade* is no sin or Transgression,
And as ever to please them it is my intention
The things to their *taste* I've thought proper to mention.
But stop, I forgot, just step over to Pine[1]
And choose me a broad piece of wood for a Sign.
Get it just painted black, then in letters of gold
Paint a long list of articles full as 'twill hold,
For although with the items of Herrings and Gin
My mercantile essay at first will begin,
I shall soon get to selling a thousand things more,
And my views will expand as increases my store.
Tea, Sugar, and Candles, and Butter, and Fruit,
And such other concerns as with Grocery suit—
Such as Eggs and Tobacco, and Brimstone and Matches,
In short all that the eye of a Customer catches.
And then as I think it will tickle their fancy
Write at length underneath ' By the bold Captain Dansey.'
Behold, my dear Sister, a well-contrived plan

[1] A cabinet-maker.

By which I shall honestly live if I can.
But something is wanting, I'm not quite at rest,
You must find me a Wife, now you must, I protest,
For this is a rule of unparalleled worth,
An unequal Match is the worst thing on earth.
Now I think if Dame Fortune e'er thought it worth while
On the plans of a Mortal propitious to smile
She might roll on her Wheel half the Universe round
And a case as deserving is not to be found.
Indeed, my dear Sister, I earnestly beg
Your friendly assistance and that of Aunt Peg,
And if ever you hear an unsatisfied voice
Or aught to dissuade me from this my firm choice,
You may tell them from me that to thwart a child's will
In the choice of his Trade is an evident Ill.
Give to children good prospects their Judgments to form,
Let them choose for themselves and they'll weather the storm—
They will all do their Duty whate'er may befall them
In that state of Life where't has pleased God to call them."

Among the lighter pieces may further be cited "A Valentine sent to the Seven Miss Sparrows" written by "Mr. Eagles"—possibly that Somersetshire John Eagles (1783–1855) who was a landscape painter, a frequent contributor to "Blackwood's Magazine," and a clergyman. His Valentine suggests that he found embarrassment rather than safety in numbers:

"To which of all the virgin train
Shall I my heart resign?
And I will be at her window
To be her Valentine.

"Should I to lovely Sarah first
My secret vows impart,
Letitia's voice would reach my ear
And captivate my heart.

"By Henrietta's skilful hand
E'en Nature's flowers improve,
While sweet Louisa strikes the lyre
And wakes the heart to love.

"But hark! another angel sings
That never can be mine;
For Lucy to her heart's content
Has found her Valentine.

"The glowing tints that Charlotte spreads,
A second nature give,
The fluttering insect spreads his wings
And seems almost to live.

"Sweet Caroline whose feeling heart
No greater bliss can know,
Than to relieve the wretch distress'd
And soothe the pangs of woe.

"While sportive Fanny sweetly gay
As bird that haunts the stream
From flower to flower securely flies
Nor owns a constant flame.

"By Heaven! you're all so good and fair
By each my heart is won,
I love you all so much I swear
I dare not fix on one!"

* * *

The only prose item in the album is curious—for it is a piece of characteristic criticism by S. T. Coleridge "written on the blank leaf of Mr. Lamb's copy of Dramatic Scenes by Barry Cornwall." The curious thing is that so far as can be found Elizabeth Charter was not acquainted with any one of the three authors concerned—yet here, in her album, copied in before 1824, is Coleridge's comment written by him in Lamb's copy of a book published in 1819. It suggests, indeed, that Elizabeth Charter must have known the Lambs, though there is no evidence that she did. The passage

is, however, true Coleridge, and as such cannot be overlooked :

" Barry Cornwall is a Poet me saltum indice, and in that sense of the term in which I apply it to C. Lamb and W. W[ordsworth] ; these are Poems of great merit, the author of which I should not yet feel impelled so to designate. The faults of these Poems are no less things of hope than the beauties, both are just what they ought to be, i.e, *now*. If B. C. be faithful to his genius, it in due time will warn him that as Poetry is the identity of all other knowledge, as a Poet cannot be a great Poet but as being likewise inclusively an Historian and Naturalist, in the light as well as in the life of Philosophy : all other men's worlds are his Chaos.

" Hints obitorare — not to permit delicacy and exquisitiveness to reduce into effeminacy.

" Not to permit beauties by repetition to become mannerisms.

" To be jealous of fragmentary compositions—as Epicurism of genius and Apple pie made all of Quinces.

" Item, that dramatic Poetry must be poetry hid in thought and passion, not thought and passion disguised in the dress of poetry.

" Lastly, to be economic and withholding in similies [*sic*] Figures etc. they will all find their place sooner or later, each as the Luminary of a Sphere of its own. There can be no Galaxy in Poetry, because it is language ; ergo successive, ergo every the smallest star must be seen singly. There are not five Metrists in the kingdom whose books are known to me to whom I could have held myself allowed to have spoken so plainly. But B. C. is a man of genius and it depends on himself (competence protecting him from gnawing and distracting cares) to become a rightful Poet, i.e, a great man.

" Oh for such a man worldly prudence is transfigured

into the highest spiritual duty! How generous is self-interest in him whose true self is all that is good and hopeful in all ages as far as the language of Spencer [*sic*] Shakespeare and Milton shall become the mother tongue."

Though competence protected him from gnawing and distracting cares Barry Cornwall was not to qualify as a great poet. Indeed, the truth of Coleridge's dictum on this point may well be questioned; our literary annals on the whole more strongly bear out Shelley's view that men

> "Are cradled into Poetry by wrong,
> They learn in suffering what they teach in song."

* * *

In the days of albums most people seem to have cultivated the art of verse-writing, and to have been able to write more or less satisfactory pieces by way of tribute exacted by their friends. Lady Malet and her eldest son Sir Alexander are represented in this volume, but their work need not detain us. As the book belonged to Elizabeth Charter, however, the verses which she wrote for Miss Southey's album (and copied into her own) may be given in conclusion. Their subject is "The Album":

> "What is an Album? 'tis a thing
> Made up of odds and ends;
> A Drawing here and there, and Rhymes
> By dear poetic friends.
>
> "Wit thinly scattered up and down,
> And lines of every measure;
> A Tree—a Butterfly—a Flower—
> Compose the motley treasure.

"Here you may trace a pigmy hand,
And there a giant's strength,
Verses exceeding dull like mine,
Fam'd only for their length.

"The elder Bards of high renown
Will sometimes lend their aid,
With master-strokes of light, which serve
To throw the rest in shade.

"Whilst humbler Aspirants to Fame,
A never-ending crew,
Will sing of Love and lily hands
And eyes of heavenly blue.

"Sonnets and Epigrams are there,
Acrostics con amore,
Rhymes upon Waterloo, and lo
The Album is before ye.

"But hers a gem of brighter hue
With neither flaw nor stain,
Till one, the lowliest of the low,
Presumed to add a strain.

"But thine, dear Edith, thine the fault,
And mine the want of skill,
Thou wouldst reserve a page for me
I but obey thy will.

"And well I know, sweet friend, that thou
Wilt guard with jealous care
My humble name from critic's eye
And critic's tongue severe.

"Enough for me if thou wilt look
With kindness on the lay,
Remembering one who loves thee well
When thou art far away.

"E. C. Janʸ 1814."

Though anxious to have her lines guarded with jealous care from critic's eyes, Elizabeth Charter doubled the chance of their meeting such eyes by copying them into her own album!

CHAPTER VI

LETTERS, 1815

> "Disposed to wed, e'en while you hasten, stay;
> There's great advantage in a small delay:—
> Thus Ovid sang, and much the wise approve
> This prudent maxim of the priest of Love."
>
> *The Parish Register.*

IT was, as we have seen, in the winter of 1814–15, probably at the beginning of the latter year, that George Crabbe, still in his first year as Vicar of Trowbridge, met Elizabeth Charter at the house where her brother-in-law General Peachey was staying. To her, presumably at that address, the poet wrote the first of the letters of our collection—dated from Trowbridge, March 6, 1815.

"I thought, Dear Lady,—What will not vanity suggest?—that you expected from me something, some half dozen lines to be placed with your other memorials, the Autographs of men who had the good fortune also, of having your wishes expressed to them: a thought indeed occurred to me when I had myself that pleasure; it was obvious and would naturally occur to almost every other man, yet as men in general do not versify their thoughts, I was willing to believe that by this means I might succeed in my endeavour to make it most peculiarly mine, but on my Return to this Place, I found my son ill with Pain and Fever and my power of versification was quickly annihilated, yet as I am desirous that you should know how much I wished to obey what

I conceived to be your commands, had you more fully expressed them, I determined to send the rough draft, the very sketch, rude as it is, of what I purposed, rather than hazard an Appearance of inattention.

" Accept dear Madam my thanks for the honour you confer upon me : I pay them with a kind of melancholy pleasure : Pleasure it is for I have seen you and there is sadness in it—you may smile if you please—because it will too probably return no more. I have the honour to be dear Lady, respectfully and obediently yours."

What the " rough draft " of verses may have been cannot be known for certain, though it is not fanciful to assume that they were the lines found in Elizabeth Charter's album, which are given in a preceding chapter.

* * *

The next letter—which shows that the verses had met with the recipient's approval—was also addressed to Pulteney Street, and but a few days later (March 14).

" As I fully purposed to be at Bath on an Early Day of the present week, I felt assured that I should have the Pleasure of meeting you my dear madam and telling you, as well as I could, which is not very well, how much I am obliged by your acceptance of my poor Verses and still more by your notice of my proud Hope that you would admit me among the Candidates for your Esteem, not because I am conscious of meriting the place (for the Hopes are not so proud) but because I greatly desire it. I know indeed that a Man's Wishes are not to be allowed as Substitutes for his Worth but they have their effect notwithstanding and therefore dear Lady recollect that as a Candidate for your Friendship, I stand upon the strength of my own Wishes and the high, that is the due estimation in which I hold your favour. All this would I have said, could I have seen

GEORGE CRABBE

(From an oil-painting in the possession of Mrs. Mackay, the Grange, Trowbridge.)

you and even yet I hope for that Pleasure, but there is a young Lady who expects me to meet her in the Morning and who will not accept the Man whom she favours but by the Interposition of the Rector himself though he has two Sons in orders and both at this time *well* enough to witness those Vows and pronounce that Blessing; but at such time, if ever, a Lady must be allowed some indulgence to even inexplicable Preferences, and I must be detained one Day longer.

"On Thursday Morning I expect to be at Bath and hope on calling at No. 11 in Pulteney Street (is it not so?) to hear that I am not a Day too late: is it not so? I ask because I trusted my Memory and that after repeated warnings that it was not to be trusted. Previously to this call I mean to wait on my Friend Mr. Norris in 103 Sydney Place and there my Dear Madam, if I be so unfortunate as to be detained beyond *your* time, have the goodness to direct to me one consolatory line, and if possible tell me that Bath is indeed to be the place of Residence: by being detained, I mean by this unexpected partiality of this Young Lady for a Rector's Blessing, a kind of Flattery I am by no means reconciled to and yet she is in a certain degree, a Favourite.

"When you observe my dear Lady that you are a citizen of the World, you mean I trust no more than this, that you can reside where you please; yet I too well know what that in some cases implies. It is the Liberty of the Desert to some, and only signifies that they may be alone, anywhere: in Solitude wheresoever it pleases them, but this cannot be your Freedom: You must have Friends. Still there may be Ties cut asunder, and Bonds of affection cancelled, and the tenderest associations dissolved and Places once endeared by causing the most interesting Recollections now become seats and sources of the most poignant grief and mortification.

"Yes I well know that in a melancholy sense we

may be Citizens of the World and care very little in which part we suffer. There is a sense in which I look upon myself as such Citizen, for though I have a fixed Habitation and am tyed to a place by Contracts and Duties, yet my mind does not love to abide there, nor among eight thousand minds can meet with one that makes this the favourite Home. When the Duties are done, the Affections or at least the Imagination go forth and we wander (Citizens thus of the World) in search of other Wanderers—but you must not be teized with such Travellers and their Adventures, though if I were *more* than Candidate I would give you the Tragi-Comic Story of the last eighteen months of a Life that for more than eighteen years was almost without incident invariably cloudy and cheerlessly calm without any storm to cause apprehendsion or any sunshine to dissipate the gloom, but how is it that I continue to amuse myself ? It is not polite I am sure, and you will be very good if you pardon it, because it is natural and because there are those to whom it is pleasant to talk of our Pains—shall I not find a few words (if but very few) at Sidney Place ? If I find them not, will the cause be, that I shall find you in Pulteney Street ?—Be it *so*.

" I am, my dear Madam, with every respect Yours

" If anything here written, should appear, as I am afraid something may—more assuming more free than you can intirely approve, have the goodness Dear Lady to consider—you were condescending and I aspiring, but that no man living has more dread of giving cause for just Resentment nor is more in Awe of the Rebuke of offended sensibility."

Crabbe's friend, Mr. Norris, of 103 Sydney Place, was no doubt the Norris of Fawley in Hampshire, to whom there are many later references. He may have been a member of the Taunton family, to which Henry Norris,

classical scholar (1752–1823), and Edward Norris, the Orientalist, his nephew (1795–1872), belonged.

* * *

The next letter suggests that Elizabeth Charter consulted Crabbe with respect to a tutor or schoolmaster for her cousins, the sons of Lady Malet. The occasional breaks in this and subsequent letters are caused by the cutting away of the signature presumably for the gratification of collectors of mere autographs. It is addressed to her (May 5, 1815) at Wilbury House, Amesbury, and from it we learn that General Peachey had married again.

"It distresses me my dear Madam to find that after waiting so long, I am not able to inform you that I know any young man or indeed any man whom I can recommend for the situation you describe; I will persist in my enquiries till I hear that they are needless or till I succeed: there is one Friend, at Cambridge in whom I am disposed to place much confidence, and he is returned to his College after a considerable absence; he is diffident indeed and loth to recommend, but I will endeavour to excite his attention in this case, and he is almost the only Person with whom I have now any connection or correspondence.

"I am well pleased to learn that your Time had past pleasantly, but it takes from my Self-importance, for when I think you as wanting spirits and unamused with the things around you, then indeed something whispers, and probably vanity, that my Letters might remove a little of the Tedium, the Dis-relish of Life, but even Vanity does not suggest that in your Intervals of enjoyment and satisfaction I can add to your Amusement, or even engage your notice; but let me be of use at any Period and I will be thankful.—I have past some days in Bath

lately, but those Meetings which were very pleasant are over for the year and perhaps will occur no more :

" How Mrs. Norris and I came to associate so cordially is a mystery inexplicable on any solution except on my part, gratitude for unexpected notice and on hers a good-natured wish to find an Author rational on general subjects. We parted with appearance of regret and promises of future Meetings, this is all well, but all this does not take from the Loneliness of the Parsonage at Trowbridge ; could I see other Creatures walking in this garden, and looking at these shrubs I should find some Beauty in them myself, but not so as I now am, and I have the teizing consciousness that my own want of Fortitude or Discernment, or Affection, or Confidence in one of the gentlest and most confiding of her Sex was the Occasion of this Solitude, and that I am punished for my Doubts and Apprehendsions ; not dear Lady for my feelings ; of these and that susceptibility which you speak of, Heaven knows I feel no shame, but am rather glad so to feel, so to be affected by what ought to affect all Men. Condescendsion and Sensibility in a Being lovely and highly meriting the Partiality she generally inspires, but who by a Fatality or a Perverseness *somewhere* has been made *uncomfortable*, to use as pointless a word as I can.

"All this I had tried to explain to you, and have actually written three large Pages of the longer kind of Paper when I began to find that my story was still confused and wanted Explanation so I have laid aside the long confession and mean in as few words as possible to inform you what has been my Fault and how I have suffered for giving way to that Weakness which I have already spoken of, the foolish Idea [that] Time had not the same effect upon me as he has on my contemporaries—know then, dear Lady that about 2 years since began a correspondence between me and a Miss W. (names hereafter) in Cornwall. She sent me a Tale for versifica-

tion and that introduced many other subjects: Something of Impropriety was hinted by her as we proceeded, and I then might have convinced myself as I did the lady that I was in my 58th year and this with my Profession, and I cannot tell what more, put an end to all scruples of the kind; so we wrote on and shall I say the very Truth? I must! let me whisper then, that I soon began to dream Dreams of unseasonable happiness. I fancied this Nymph unlike her Sister Nymphs, one who wd forget my Time of Life and loose the thought of gravity and coldness in the strength and ardour of the language I insensibly adopted.

"At length we talked of Situations, past adventures and Probabilities of meeting and approximating nearer to the subject which then engrossed all my mind. I concluded that I must be sufficiently understood and that my invisible girl was only playful and coquettish or that she was like me dreaming indeed, but still honest in her purposes. One letter would decide and I waited the Reply just as I came to Trowbridge: the Reply was brief and friendly: the lady had been engaged some 2 or 3 years before and a Rectory falling has enabled the Clerical Lover to lead my Correspondence [*sic*] to his Church and to her Parsonage.—I believe (tho' I could not for an instant fancy the Form or Face of this creature yet I believe) no disappointment could be more severe, for the very Time that Imagination continued to prevail over me but I soon found that the pain was of visionary and transitory nature and had nothing followed and no other Nymph—wicked and officious Beings thus to glide into a Man's Way—had no other been near to support the dying fancy I had been quite in good Heart and Health before my lost Lady had apologized for her delayed Confession, but there was all this time a Friend, who read every Letter and every Verse, for I took every Method that was allowed me, and strange creatures are Men and Women! while I was thus attentive to raise

some partial feelings in the mind of the gipsy who wrote to me, this other who only read what was written, became interested and engaged and at length, you must give me credit strange as it is ! she caught my disease : It did not signify to her that as I was as old as her Father ! I could write in just that style which she had fancied to be that of genuine affection and truth (and so by the way it was, tho' not quite as she in her readiness to believe had conceived).

" It soon appeared that, my young friends had foreseen all this, and it was judged that this apparently strong affection which could not be said to have an object might readily be transferred to the Friend, who now began to write occasionally and we were three very affectionate simpletons, as you can conceive a trio to be. Here I must break off my Story, and you must if you please imagine, how the last lady engrossed very soon all the writing, and how it became a regular and friendly Intercourse—I cannot add that my—(what shall I call it ?) Impression was transferred, tho' I ceased to think anything of ye creature who made it ; but the letters of the friend Charlotte, for Charlottes they were both, were pleasant and flattering to me, and a calm kind of affection began to take place in my mind, so that I was almost afraid of our meeting and in spite of all her Avow'd Regard I could but feel that at our first interview she would readily adopt the character of daughter which I had proposed.

" Will you guess her answer ?—you cannot. She offered to bind herself and leave me free and I believe w^{d}. have married, if it could have been, unknown as we were, and do not think lightly of her, I beseech you dear Lady— She had really rejected a young man who could have made her a very fair settlement which I could not do and she is truly an unaffectedly decent and even reserved woman —but she had suffered herself to believe that there was to be Happiness with a Man such as she had deemed that I was ; that I refused such a proposal you may believe,

and we met: This by no means lessened her regard or altered her purpose—I found her a very—but I will not describe: I am only surprised at us both, at her for such partiality, at myself for not taking immediate advantage of it.—And now my dear Madam I can only hurry over the subsequent events—there was a vixen A[unt] who was angry and obstinate and a foolish passionate Brother, a Fa[ther] who cared for nothing and a Sister who wrote of carriages and Follies of that nature. The Mother and Charlotte were reasonable creatures, saving her opinion of me. We tried for some time to reconcile Things to us, and after that ourselves to the perverseness of Things.

"I would not hazard the Distress she must feel as my Widow, for I could not look forward to saving much for her, tho' we might have lived decently enough for a few years perhaps. The Aunt who alone could, would give no promise and in short we began to think there were Impediments in our way, nor could I be said to be so bewildered as in the first instance, yet I admire the courage as well as affection of this young Lady. We have ceased to correspond and I would have persuaded her to exchange our letters but I could not. I hope she is married but I do not know—I am not assuredly for I feel the loneliness, and have occasionally quarrelled with myself for thus neglecting to secure the affections of one of whom I had every reason to think well and feel . . . inexplicable good opinion or at least its consequences. I am ashamed of this long Story, which however is very imperfectly told.

"I wish you would permit me to put the Red Marks on the outside of the Letters: I always think that Ladies appropriate Money to certain purposes and what is taken for such things as Letters probably rob some Fund of Charity &c.—Do! will you my dear Lady, but you say that in a greater thing you will comply—Well! Let me be the chooser and I will consent, yet I can

scarcely bear that you should pay for such writings as these: Consider of it and yet I do not dislike the Conditions, but then be mindful of them yourself. General and Mrs. Peachey were very obliging to me till the morning we parted. All my Bath friends are lost to me, but much has been gained and I feel my debt to Col. Houlton with whom I dine this day. It was his kindness which introduced me to Mr. and Mrs. Norris, by them and with them I gained access to Mrs. Peachey and at their house I saw the Lady who will be very good if she can pardon the waste of Time which this dull Story requires and very very good indeed if she will soon write . . . and confer both Favour and Pleasure on her obliged and grateful . . ."

The naïvely told story of the elderly clergyman's love by correspondence with a distant lady whom he had never met and the transference of his affection to her friend when the need rose, would be diverting if one did not feel it pathetic as evidence of the old man's loneliness, his hungering after the quiet home affections. His telling the story thus to Elizabeth Charter makes it appear that something of the little romance of the previous autumn had become known, but the quiet recital of the way in which his homage was transferred from one Charlotte to another was little likely to make a sentimental impression, if such was desired, on his newest friend.

Colonel and Mrs. Houlton lived at Farley (or Fairleigh) Castle about three miles west of Trowbridge, and they appear to have been among Crabbe's best friends in the neighbourhood. "Never," as he wrote to them, "did any kind beings in your situation of life and surrounded by friends of your own class show such

repeated and unwearied attention to a man situated as I am and almost standing alone in Society." Thomas Moore, after a visit to Farley a few years later, wrote of it: "A pretty house, beautiful girls, hospitable host and hostess, excellent cook, good champagne and Moselle, charming music; what more could a man want?"

* * *

In the next letter (June 6, 1815) Crabbe continues the theme; discusses another lady, who had apparently been recommended to his notice as the "not impossible she," and sighs for some "made-on-purpose creature."

"No! my dear Madam, I do not wonder that even my Affairs and my Follies should be known and that *this*, among the Incidents of a Life not unproductive of Adventure was likely to become a subject of Conversation in the vicinity of the place where the Hero and Heroine resided: indeed the Lady's Papa was frank enough to come and visit the residence of his intended Son in Law in a Town where *he* was an entire stranger, there he tarried some days and consequently left every member of that populous place to his own Conjectures and Conclusions and this, with the frequency of the post office Vouchers, served for proof that Mr. C[rabbe] and Miss R[idout] had more to write and to say to one another than was usual for a grave Minister of the Church and a pleasant damsel in a distant County.

"But though the business itself was known, the circumstances were not: such kind of Connection between sixty and six and twenty is not uncommon, such union not always unpleasant, nor I presume (for thus we are prompted to vindicate our weaknesses) not in all cases more hazardous than those many alliances which take place between Lovers of the same age

perhaps, but with every other kind of Incongruity. There was nothing then wonderful in the occurrence itself, and the romantic part of it was not, I hope is not, generally known. The fancied, the visionary love of a man at that period of Life for a Nymph whom he had not seen, as well as the prepossession of another Nymph for this romantic admirer of her Friend, known to her by Letters only, and these directed and addrest to another woman, all this forms a tale for an Arabian Night, and is too Crazy for Sober Belief, and yet it had very nearly determined the colour of the years which it may please Heaven to allot me.

" Of the progress of the Dream and its Termination I will write no more ; let us dear Lady leave the subject, yet I must add that you are kind and good in wishing for the adventure an happier Conclusion, but are we justified in supposing the one it has is not the happiest possible ? Circumstanced as the parties were, I verily believe it was and if ever I should have, as I earnestly hope, the pleasure of conversing with you and the subject should be introduced, I will take the freedom of giving you reasons for such opinion. I have only to add that I shall be glad to learn that there is no such person as Miss C. R[idout]—but do not say *rejected :* you really hurt me by half-believing, for you do not surely entirely believe, that this dear and good girl was —I mean for *herself* and on her *own account*—by me rejected ? I trust that she is no object of Pity and that no Remedy is needed.

"—Unhappy, I will not fancy, will endeavour not to think you, yet if my letters can amuse, if you can smile with or at the writer, most cheerfully will I join my efforts with those of your nearer friends—I myself coveting to be near—and will in this way draw upon your purse till you shall exclaim ' The red mark after all was judiciously adopted.'

" Bath is no more the seat of Attraction : I have

been called there by business, but it is not longer a virtue in me to return the same evening, and I now pass Pulteney Street and Sydney Place with a look of Regret perhaps, but no longer with a sigh of affection. To Mrs. Norris I have just written, but must not expect a letter till I can call it a reply: in the mean time I amuse myself with excursions to Farley and Rood Ashton, with visits of Duty and Idleness, and with making a few new Rhymes and vamping a few old sermons. Miss Bellair I saw at General Peacheys, and being pleased by her we began a half-earnest half-sportive conversation about Beauty and Attatchment, . . . not Death, but there was nothing that [made an enduring] impression upon me, and the Lady has probably forgotten a man who did not express admiration or whose attention, if it had been particularly excited was so little worth. I have not seen Miss B. since, but have heard by her brother of our—nay this is very foolish. No, Miss B. is not the Lady I want, even if by some favour of fortune we were placed together—Oh! for that Being whom I can conceive to be in the world, though I shall not live to prove it. One to whom I might have recourse in all Humours and Dispositions; in all my Distempers of Mind, visionary Causes of Mortification and Fairy Dreams of Pleasure. One with whom I might communicate the more serious as well as lighter thoughts and purposes of my mind and all these Clouds and all that Sunshine by which Men with any feelings and more especially with my feelings are so elevated and depressed. Oh! for some made-on-purpose Creature whom I might at my own will though with all respectful freedom sit with, and walk and read or hear [or] be silent [with] just as the Humour and Spirit prompted and for whom I should feel the partiality and affection that gives fresh interest to these conversations and to this Silence—Alas! everybody is away except those with souls unsuited and minds taken

up by—no matter what—not by me nor by my real or imaginary Cares or Satisfactions.

"Should you enquire 'am I unreasonable enough to desire all this Comfort without a wish to impart any?' I answer, No indeed in honest Truth I would gratefully and patiently listen and sympathize with all I heard. Shall I confess to you that I have been trying to train up a Lady or two for these good offices of Friendship, but hitherto I must not boast of my success. I believe there is a good and even affectionate Being who has a kind of filial regard for me, but she wants the requisite qualifications, and I know a young lady who appears to possess them, but I cannot for an instant indulge the vanity that insinuates she has the affection and thus I must try and reconcile myself to my solitude; here I sit in this large lone house, and at Times, tho' certainly not at all Times, feel a wish that strong as the Impediments were, they had not be [*sic*] permitted to operate at the critical time when I was asking myself—'Is it best to Proceed?' And now, all is so deserted. How are friendships in your part of the world? Are they plenty? Are they permanent? Alas! What avail it, your part of the world is not mine. But away with murmurings! Honour me by your letters. Favour me with your Sentiments. Indulge me with your favourable opinion, and believe me with all sincerity and cordial esteem."

* * *

Miss Bellair was evidently not the "not impossible she" for Crabbe. His remark that he had been "trying to train up a Lady or two for these good offices of friendship" suggests that he had looked upon ladies in his Trowbridge circle for the possible position of wife—though at his age it was rather late to adopt the plan, even in a modified fashion, that had been employed so unsuccessfully by the author of "Sandford and Merton."

Thomas Day had two girls brought up and educated with a view to making one of them his wife, but this attempt of man to dispose instead of limiting himself to proposing had proved a dismal failure. Crabbe, one cannot help feeling, with all his love of the home, his hankering after the "dear domesticities," was afraid of making the irrevocable plunge.

The "excursions to Farley and Rood Ashton" were to his friends the Houltons and to the family of Richard Long, M.P., to whom there are several references in the correspondence. Farley has already been mentioned as being about three miles to the west of Trowbridge, Rood Ashton is about the same distance to the south-east.[1]

* * *

In the next letter, though not declaring himself a suitor, the poet rallied his correspondent on her resolve not to marry.

"Doubtless my dear lady you have read Prior's story of the thief and the Cordelier, but you may forget and it will not detain us long. I'll tell you how it was—'My good fellow,' said the devout man 'Be hanged quietly and you shall sup in Paradise,' 'My Revd. Father' replied the rogue 'I am not fit to sup in Paradise, the thing would do for you infinitely better, pray be hanged in my place and sup for me,' 'Nay my son' said the Cordelier, 'what is suitable for one of us does not fit the other, I cannot feast anywhere for this night by our order is marked for a Fast.'

"Such is the story, and what asks Miss Charter is the application? This my dear madam 'I advise you' says this fair lady 'to be hanged, I mean married as soon as

[1] Rood Ashton is now the property of the Right Hon. Walter Long, M.P.

possible and that will free you from your melancholy and you will sup in Paradise and be happy as Love and Hymen can make you.' 'Thanks my dear adviser but as you are infinitely more fitted for this remedy than I am and as you have the same complaint, I recommend to you the first experiment, be married yourself and sup in Paradise as soon as possible.' Nay answers the crafty giver of counsel what suits one person does not suit another I am wedded to a single life, 'and that by our order is marked as a Fast.'

"Well laugh at the similitude as you please but I do affirm there is a likeness, I do not mean that you are a Father Confessor or that I am a condemned Robber or that Wedlock and Hanging are the same things but yet as Fluellen tells us there are figures in all things and they come after one another indifferent well: you would have me hunt Charlottes, but you will not seek Charles's, nor be sought, so far as you can help it, and I can perceive no fair reasoning in all this. 'Wedded to Celibacy' quoth she? Nay dear Miss Charter that should not be: there are possibly cases indeed, and yours may be one, but I hope not: Sickness of Body and Sickness of Mind are neither of them incurable, though sometimes very stubborn, and in seeking Reasons for this immoveable determination I find so few that I suspect none are to be found in support of your Case.

"You have I know my dear lady felt the Loss of some very dear to you; those bound to you in the bond of Nature and the Tyes of Habit and by all the tenderness that increases with our years especially when the Meetings are frequent and the Family relation strengthened by voluntary affection and with these there may have been one with whom the tye was all voluntary and surpassing in strength that of Nature —but if so this is indeed a tender subject and must not be trifled with! No: nor shall it: I have felt too much

of the misery of having these cords of the heart broken that I could as soon make light of the confession of a dying penitent as of the cutting remembrances of a wounded spirit and a widowed heart. Yet even in this grief Time, Reflection, Friendship, Piety, all do much and contribute to the ease always and frequently to the cure of this poignant and deep rooted Species of affliction —yet let me not dwell here, but as I go into some other views and have other object let me just stay and declare to you that neither Charlotte in Milford or any Charlotte nor any of Charlotte's sex is the particular object of my pursuit ; indeed I have no pursuit, except my own Repose and a Remedy for this Loneliness and Depression which you believe has arisen from Disappointment and in the cure of which you are kindly interested and send me your obliging and earnest Wishes, wishes my dear Miss Charter which I return with equal earnestness.

" Monday 3 July.

" I was called away when writing yesterday and return gladly to my employment, for while I am thus engaged, I feel as if I bore some relation to somebody ; I am not entirely alone and when I add the consideration that I am conversing with a lady who will retain her compassion—at least I strive so to flatter myself—and will write to me at no long Intervals, then it is that I admit a portion of Chearfulness to enter amid the gloom of my Mind. There is something inexpressibly heavy and miserable in the feeling, as I do, alone in the bustle of Society. With my Servants I cannot associate, my sons are absent, my few friends scattered over the country and the only family of Trowbridge whom I visit are there no longer. In this State of Mind almost anything, even Business which I in general dislike, is relief and after a fatiguing Day's Duty I was glad the last evening to be engaged an hour at the Sunday School, because I was associated with some charitable ladies in an employment.

"Such Dear Miss Charter is the Mind of a Man who is the more thankful for your notice and of whose complaint you may and perhaps do judge accurately, but not so of the remedy he seeks: There is much I believe in my Change of Place, here all is strange and new, in Leicestershire there was a familiarity with all things; the villages, the objects, all were home or allied to home, and I had no idea that a man of my age could feel these Schoolboy sensations, but I do and there is a want of intimacy of local association that I suppose is not to be overcome. 'I need not, it is true trouble you with such proofs of my Weakness'—but I was thinking of those conversations at Bath of which you write so obligingly, for though I dare no more anticipate than you, nor in reason ought I so much, yet admitting that we live and are in our usual state of health and you do not alter your purpose and I can possibly get assistance,—alas! and here are four requisites already and the want of either may deprive me of my promised pleasure. Well! they shall not deprive me of the pleasure of thinking of it, the anticipation at least I can have and with respect to Castle-Building! I challenge you any day or at any time or place to build with me and I'll be judged by any competent Master or Mistress-Builder of Castles whether mine is not as airy and majestic, as large and as transitory as you can make for the life of you. It is strange indeed if I who have built all my life, from ten years old upwards should now be outdone by such lady as you, a mere infant. Even at this instant I have a castle building! such a Castle!, but I will throw a veil of darkness round it, you shall not see my Castle: it shall be built in secret and I alone will penetrate the surrounding Gloom.—The worst is that even in Castle building you cannot build but according to the colour of the reigning humour: a sad workman cannot fabricate a fine, gay, glittering Mansion; he must have the dwelling suited to the

THE RECTORY, TROWBRIDGE, IN 1913

(The three windows at the angle to the right are those of George Crabbe's study.)

inhabitant—But I do waste your time and my own; not that mine is worth much and you can leave reading when you please: do not forget to write though and then read or not as you feel disposed.

"But is it a fact, an honest truth from the Heart, that if you had the Fairy Rod that assembles distant Friends you would *not omit* Trowbridge when you applied it? Blessings on your charity, I should at least be grateful. I forget whether I saw a sister of General or of Mrs. Peachey? I thought the latter and do not remember a *Mr.* ——. I do envy you for belonging to so many People: do they all love you very much and leave you no want, no room for more affection? I judge so, and yet yours must be an extraordinary case, but so it may be and I did hear an excellent character of you and would have had all the Particulars if I could, but people content themselves with generalizing; some good nature and Christian charity you must have or you would not be an assistant to lift the weight from my spirits, and when I say assistant, I scarcely know who join with you in the Act of Benevolence. Do you adhere tenaciously to your Resolutions? Are you inexorable respecting the red mark? Is there no prevailing with you?

"Mrs. Norris has written but her spirits are too strong for me and I cannot laugh as loud as I ought to do. Here is a Miss Long, Flora Long, and she is not unlike a Flora, yet the flower is said to be beyond the first bloom, it may be but I thank her for appearing to feel some interest in the solitary Rector of an adjoining Parish, not her own, and therefore I am doubly grateful, and yet there is something whimsical in the wood-and-grove walks and conversations of so unequal a pair, but she also has left me. I am, however, very cautious how I suffer myself to depend for comforts upon ladies who may be taken off by their swains and not even think of me again, and to say the truth—notwithstanding her

being wedded to a virgin state—this is what, at certain times, renders the view of certain visits at Bath, and even the correspondence at present, comforts of precarious nature that may be soon lost and then never found. Yet write and do not let my own gloomy views be my punishment more than they now are. Your faithful and obliged, G. CRABBE.

"P.S.—A letter just rec^{d} from Miss Long invites me to Bath. Alas, I am this day to visit a newly married pair at another place. Tomorrow I go about begging for our School—on Wednesday I have Church duty and on Thursday my fair lady will reach the city where she expects me, expects did I say! no it is she who says it, but I need not give her too much credit and yet if you were to assure me that when at Bath I should be expected by you and rec^{d} with some degree of cordiality I am afraid that my vanity would combine with your politeness, I should believe literally and rejoice in the delusion."

Crabbe's chaff about Elizabeth Charter's declaration that she was "wedded to celibacy" suggests that there had at the time been talk of her marriage. The "loss" of which he speaks was probably that of her uncle, Sir Charles Malet, who had died at the beginning of the same year.

* * *

On July 26 the poet wrote to Miss Charter at her home at Lynchfield, near Taunton, and rallied her again on her resolve that she would not marry. The letter has been twice endorsed with words of indignation in a later handwriting, whether because the poet urged the same argument in favour of marriage that Shakespeare had employed in his Sonnets—

"You had a father, let your son say so"

—or whether because of the anecdote towards the close, can only be guessed. The story is certainly more ludicrous than pleasant, and is perhaps more than a little surprising for its coarseness in this correspondence, but it is difficult to believe that the indignant endorsement could have been inspired by anything other than mid-Victorian "niceness."

"There is no reasoning with you: you are like a Sovereign and argue tyranically: when there is nothing more convincing to say you have only to add 'I tell you so it is and shall be.'—To be sure if you *will* enter into no closer alliance with the unworthy sex, than you at present allow yourself, so it must be and Man's Duty is submission, but you do not call this reasoning I hope.

"You have witnessed great oppression on one side and Disappointment and Misery on the other: unwearied Provocation met by invincible Patience. Well! so have I; but these are peculiar Trials: We are not all either Daemons or Angels. There are some dreadful operations in Surgery especially in Gun-Shot wounds, but would you have no Man defend his Country, because he may meet with these terrible events? 'No' you reply 'other people may go if they please, but you will not, you will not hazard so much.'

"Then you are a Rebel Lady and a Coward and do not contribute your part to your poor dear Country's Welfare and preservation! How you are to be punished for your Treason against the very fundamental Laws of Society, I do not know, and as you are a Favourite, keep your own Counsel and make no such wicked Declarations any more and I will not betray you for what is past, but you must not think thus unquestioned to raise a Standard of Rebellion against the Statutes and Ordinances which your Mamas and Grandmamas so dutifully submitted to—there now be good—with

Respect to what scorns and disadvantages, what insults and inconveniences, antient Spinsters are subject to, I must take leave to borrow one coarse expression from the vulgar tongue and say 'What is that to you?' 'But you have other reasons which must not appear in black and white,' *other Reasons?* I have heard of none yet: other *royal* Reasons are they not? I have been conjecturing for some time what they can be, but my Guessings like your Communications, must be deferred till we meet,—when will that be I wonder? Your moving further from me, is not the way I fear; and yet as you have a peculiar mode of reasoning, so perhaps you have of meeting, and going the furthest way about may be the nearest way home.

"But to be serious—which is exceedingly hard for me when I am in low spirits—When am I to have that satisfaction? I have some expectations of obtaining 5 or 6 weeks Freedom this ensuing Autumn, and if I succeed I hope to see some of my friends, whom otherwise I should despair of meeting, but the prospect you held out to me of making Bath the place of your Residence, gave me hope of seeing you, even if I could not obtain a substitute for myself. If your Plan be varied, you will have Goodness to let me know it? and certainly if the alteration be productive of pleasure to you, I will acquiesce, but I had looked forward to some visits with more *comfort* than anyone beside myself would speak of, nor indeed would I think that you were one who needed such humble species of good as *comfort.* What would I give, what would I not give, for such hours in Trowbridge as I might—Well! I have said this before, but the same feelings naturally lead to the same expressions, and do you know that I still feel that weakness which, I suppose, some real Ill, Pain, Want, or Suffering of some kind would expel, that is a Sensation of Loneliness that is increased when I walk through this populous Town and then I cannot avoid thinking

there is not one being among these who either loves or hates, or has an Hope or a Fear that centres in, me. I repeat that I know my folly, but that does not take away the feeling.

"Had I any talent I would with great pleasure offer my Services for the Inscription you mention, but if I were to write twenty not one would fit the meaning of those most concerned. I am sure that I should be perfectly satisfied on my own account. That union of Pride and ill humour I may hope that I am exempted from. I saw a Mausoleum in Suffolk belonging to the family of Arcedechne a wealthy West Indian gent^n., and that if I remember rightly had some verse from the New Testament. If a Latin is approved almost any Scholar *resident* in College or in daily habits of quotation etc. would supply you. If you think it not time entirely thrown away you will be more particular as to the *kind* and *length* and *form*, etc.

"You describe Wilbury and its Mistress very feelingly, and I begin to believe, nay to be convinced, that you have a considerable portion of the friendly and affectionate sensations as well as sentiments, tho' it may not be quite so easy to reconcile these to certain Resolutions, or half-Resolutions (for I will not call them more) which you have made. That the Calm of Friendship is preferable to the Storm of Love I will readily grant, but there is a pleasant brisk wind that is preferable to either when it blows steadily one way and is not shifting for ever and ever, but these calms are apt to . . . they admit Fears and Jealousies, Increase and Diminution and I am afraid we must confess, still without either this Love or this Friendship, with all their Evil, Life itself would be grievous and burdensome. I have not forgotten your Cousin and rejoice that your last account was so favourable.

"To run from subject to subject let me tell you how grievously disappointed you would be could

your Lettre de Cachet arrest me and my papers! I remember some years since a friend of mine when travelling was robbed of a very weighty Box, no doubt held precious by the Varlet who took it and who was admirably punished for his method of seizing property by finding ½ an Hundred weight of coarse putrefactions taken from the Highway! so would my wicked Invader with her ill gained Rubbish! lament her unprofitable crime. Here's Stuff! here's precious ware to hazard one's soul's peace for! *So* you would feast fair Lady. And I almost wish you the punishment if you would select the very little that Labour might render passable, but it cannot be; I sometimes wish . . . weakly relent, but we will argue this . . .

"P.S.—In Devonshire? Will you not say where? on the Coast? Exmouth? Sidmouth? Did I tell you Miss R[idout] is married? married in January last! Now that is a little surprising, not that she s^d^ marry or that she s^d^ not marry me, but that—it s^d^ be in January and as you puzzle me in your letter, so this may be a riddle to you. Adieu!"

"Miss R." is undoubtedly the Charlotte Ridout of the previous autumn's brief romance. Crabbe was, however, apparently over-ready to believe that the lady's heart had been caught in the rebound by another suitor. She never did marry. Edward FitzGerald wrote many years later: "Miss Ridout I remember, an elegant spinster, friend of my mother's about 1825; she had been at Sidmouth and knew Crabbe."

The "riddle" as to January was, it may be assumed, that it was in that month that Crabbe and Elizabeth Charter had first met. In accepting the rumour of Charlotte's marriage so readily Crabbe was evidently seeking to lay an unquiet memory.

* * *

Nearly a month later Crabbe wrote, on August 23, to his fair correspondent, who had, it may be believed, asked him to compose an inscription for the tomb of her uncle, Sir Charles Malet, a task which he evidently felt loth to undertake. In this letter we get a glimpse of public affairs in a mention of the great Battle of Waterloo, that decisive conflict which had taken place on June 18.

"Again my dear Lady have I to return thanks for proving to me that I yet at certain times have a place in your Recollection. Indeed I do heartily wish I could by any effort of mine render myself useful, but I almost despair of it: I will make no idle professions of Inability, but rather tell you as I may with the utmost truth, that my strength as well as my Spirit is worn away by fatigue: I can obtain no Assistance at present though I indulge the hope of success in a present enquiry at Bath for I must change my Way of Living and my daily Employments: the going about this populous and crowded town to collect from house to house Subscriptions for the wounded etc. at Waterloo, has added to the common Claims of the week and made me incapable of quiet and collected thought. I cannot even read with Comfort and I require a few Weeks Repose that I may be able once more to proceed in my Customary Duties.

"Think not dear Madam that this is anything like excuse for not turning my Mind to the subject you have placed before me; be assured I would gladly make an Essay if I could: I am well acquainted with Mr. Bowles and have just been trying to read his 'Missionary' as it ought to be read, for it is in many places very tender and beautiful: He would it is most likely write something more appropriate than I could, and perhaps we might correct each other. Have you

any objection to my mentioning your purpose to him ? If there was once a Beginning, we should probably proceed. I do not like Verse, I mean Rhyme for an Inscription of this Nature and there is as you know, a kind of Style almost peculiar and appropriated to these purposes : They term it *Lapidary*, do they not ?, from its being that which is found on Tomb-stones, Columns, and other Buildings where Inscriptions are to be found. One of the best perhaps with regard to the Length of the Lines and their musical flow and the strength of expression, was the satyrical one of Arbuthnot on Col. Charteris which is found in Pope's Works, etc. But I must quit the Subject at present for this letter is only an apology for one and I am sure if you knew the State of my Head and I may almost add of my Blood, which however this cool day temporises, you would yield me your pardon for my Defects and Omissions.

" I attend with great Patience to all you write of so excellent and amiable a Man as the Relation you have left which confirms what I before had heard from some who were no Strangers to his great or good Qualities. As Mr. Bowles wrote before he will I am sure, almost sure, have no Objection to assist us now. *May I write ?* I would not if I were myself and could depend upon my own Exertions but alas ! I am not. Do you know that since I sat down to write what a trifle has disordered my foolish Spirits. There are a Company of Comedians with us and I went with parties twice and once looked in for half an hour by myself and here is one of my Parishioners, Anonymous ! who has written to me, oh ! you cannot think with what solemn and enthusiastic Severity : telling me that I am Partaker and Encourager of their Sins in an high Degree and tho' I once should have smiled at both the abuse and the Opinion, my want of Health and Spirit renders me subservient to this Man's Dulness and Pride, for pride I suppose must in part dictate such sentiments. The

poor players he stigmatizes as wretches most pernicious and tells me I am as bad for encouraging them. A pretty state a Man's Nerves are in when this shakes him, and the words which his Judgement condemns make Impression upon his Feelings. I am sorry for your Cottage as you term it and wish I could puff it away with all my heart : I am sure I will try, but we have no persons in Trowbridge who are not connected with Factories and Business in the place : sure it cannot be that you will be altogether determined in your Measures by the Disposal of or retaining this House ! I do not love such dependant Resolutions : No ! dear Miss Charter, go to Bath for you said you would—at or near Taunton how shall I see you ?

" I think of an Absence of about 6 weeks if I can obtain Assistance and have written to Mrs. Norris to learn what that family purposes and whether a Journey to the Lakes. If not I shall pay them a short visit and go for the Coast, I think, of Devon ; At Exmouth are Mr. Long and his Family, my friends Flora and her sister Mrs. Walmesly of Bath and Miss Anne Long whom I love for a sincere visible preference which she gives her Sister to all that concerns herself, but perhaps you know the family circle : It is one of my Houses of Call and there is something domestic in a visit there that agrees with my kind of pensive and childish longing for such alliances and Associations. I cannot bear to belong to nobody. In vain Vanity tells me of my friends Lord Bath and his Brothers, or repeats to me my invitations to Bowood and Lady Jersey and some other of that Rank of Society : my foolish heart at this Time and in spite of Reason and Experience, wants Kindness, Sympathy, Affection.

" It is of no Importance to me that Lady B. tells me of my Verses or a Marchioness places me on her right hand and gives me Flattery with my Food and Wine : I would be at Home, and I felt a

little of this at Bowles' and I feel something of it at Farley; but of all places this Parsonage is the worst. 'Never less at Home than when at Home' is the Burthen of the Song of the Rector of Trowbridge— And now pray let me have your Forgiveness for not doing as you might naturally expect of me and were I well it would be unfriendly to disappoint your just expectations, but indeed I am not and I am sure my Faculties are clouded if they be not decayed. You will give me full Credit I hope when I say that it would much delight me to meet you in the Vallies of Devon and if I do not visit Cumberland, I know not any other part of our Country so likely to be my Haunt as the coast of that delightful County. Do not write so unkindly of being Dull and requiring Patience. Dear Lady what do I require with all this querulous Humour and exhausted Spirit? Happy it was for poor Miss Ridout that she had not to be the soother of such vapourish Companion: I hope she has one much more fitted to her Mind and temper as well as to her years. I rejoice sincerely that our Acquaintance ends as it does. If you remove again have ye Goodness to remember your address. Bear with me my kind friend. Accept my Sincere good Wishes and prayers for your Happiness and believe me respectfully and affectionately yours. GEO. CRABBE."

The "house to house" begging for subscriptions for the wounded at Waterloo may have been in connection with general local efforts for those who had suffered in the great victory, for at Bath, on the very day on which this letter was written, there was "a grand gala in aid of the widows and orphans of those brave soldiers who gloriously fell in the Battle of Waterloo."

The "Colonel Charteris" to whom Crabbe refers in this letter was Colonel Francis Charteris, a notorious

criminal and gambler of the early part of the eighteenth century, and the "Chartres" of Pope's "Essay on Man," where there is a stinging couplet on him.

There is something pathetic in the exclamation, "I cannot bear to belong to nobody." Its simplicity is as touching as Charles Lamb's "I have no one to call me Charlie now."

* * *

Again on September 11 Crabbe wrote somewhat dolefully of his health and spirits, and expressed deep regret at Miss Charter's decision not to remove to Bath, as he had been hoping that she would do. Miss Charter was then staying at "John Brickdale's Esq^{r}" at Stoodleigh, near Tiverton. Here we are introduced to a new "female friend" in the person of Miss Everett, a cousin of Miss Waldron of Trowbridge—and again, as in the case of the two Charlottes, the falling out with one led to an intimacy with the other, though it will be seen that he disclaims having any real *love* for either. Miss Everett may have been the daughter or sister of that W. Everett of whom the following story is told :—

"On one occasion he and other friends were going to London by the Salisbury Coach. The day was lovely, and on crossing Salisbury Plain a friend said, 'Everett, give us a song,' to which he responded by singing one of Moore's melodies; then another, and when he was about to begin a third a hand was observed to protrude from the window of the coach, and the owner of the hand cried out, 'I say, sir, who the devil are you, singing all my best songs?' A great laugh followed,

and as Everett used to say, with high glee, 'I knew he was inside, and that I should have him!' Of course it was Thomas Moore."[1]

Crabbe himself in a letter to the Houltons described Everett as "a man of seventy years with the habits of one of forty."

* * *

"Yes, dear Miss Charter you are too correct in your opinion: I am not well, but it was very unkind, nay unjust in me to write so gloomily to you, and perhaps I may be renewing the fault now, but I will write gratefully at least for I am sure I feel very thankful for your obliging Attention to my foolish Complaints and half-voluntary Diseases for sometimes I fear they are such and yet I *do* contend a little, and had yesterday a party at Dinner almost on purpose to try if I could at least bear, if not enjoy, my part in Society and I thought, I did manfully.

"I have had no more anonymous Accusations or Advice, yet have been twice more to the naughty place, not in love for overstrained Acting, but to help to fill the Seats called Boxes when a Friend speaks the Play and this being over I believe I should forbear, for there is a Decency to be observed, and in Respect to that and not in Obedience to my nameless Monitor I should forbear if at Trowbridge; but I think of obtaining Assistance for a few weeks and in that Case I will direct my way to the Coast of Devon and think of as little of this World's affairs as I possibly can. Bowles is a good Fellow and will do any reasonable Thing his Friends require, and we will require and request no other.—There is a part of your Letter Dear Lady that I would forget, if the oblivion would last: You do not then come to Bath! Do set Fire to the wicked House: I had counted (Selfish enough you see) of your coming to a Place where

[1] "Historic Houses in Bath," by R. E. Peach.

I might visit weekly at least. Now you have deprived Bath of one of its great Inducements so far as they Respect me and I shall feel it in the Languor and Indifference of my Journey there and the want of affectionate Regret in my Return, for I had set down in my mind's anticipation, so many morning Hours spent with Miss Charter and so many Walks, Exclusive of occasional Calls and Meetings at our Friends! Indeed, indeed I am sorry: must it be so? I have suffered many Deprivations lately and some Disappointments and yet I do not improve in my Strength of mind nor bear them with Fortitude, at least I do not *this* and I could quarrel with that Norton: is it not the Name? so unlike a Castle or a nice Building at Bath—but why this though? I am doing wrong in expressing my own feelings and I should think it even criminal, did I not look upon yours as fixed, or certainly not to be moved by vain wishes and such Vexation as mine: soberly then my dear Miss Charter I will say! that I am Truly sorry you will be so distant and most sincerely hope that for your Sake your Dwelling may be unexpectedly pleasant and produce you ye Happiness we all look for, or that Something yet unforeseen may change your purpose and send you to this your first chosen Place.

"I write in obedience to my Friend, but I can send nothing except these Thanks and Expressions of unavailing Regret. I hope I am correct in directing to Stoodleigh. I doubt whether I shall be Stationary, yet I cannot bear, at this time especially to loose your Letters and therefore if you favour me, direct as usual to Trowbridge and I will leave orders with my Servant how to send them. I was about to go to Swansea where my younger Son is indisposed, but my Friend Mrs. Walmesley of Bath (the married Daughter of our Representative R. Long Esq of Rood Ashton) and the Miss Longs her Sisters call me to Exmouth. The elder of these, Florentina (Flora with me) would I am almost certain be a

Favourite. Her good Sense, her Application, her reasonable Piety, her unaffected and simple Manners, (manners easy and almost rural, for rustic I will not say), and a kind of temperate and cheerful Gravity are all what you like and if I may write what I believe, like what you possess. This Flora has called me Friend for a considerable time past and I believe has all that Regard which arises from a Confidence that I shall not so act as to disgrace her for her bad choice nor cause in her Repentance for the partiality. I Esteem Mrs. W. and admire Anne ye younger for her extreme attention to her Sisters, almost to a kind of self-annihilation—but this Miss at Salisbury? Come you shall have all my paper will contain. Miss Everett has Relations at this Place: that Family I visit daily, a Father, two Sons and a Daughter, a year's Intimacy brought on of Course some Familiarity and the Lady and I being much together, and neither Lovers nor indeed Friends strictly speaking, in fact the Tye that bound us, is of rather a whimsical Nature, but as I said being often together and having not much to talk of we amused ourselves by quarreling about once in two or three weeks as Occasions arose or our Spleen dictated. Now there was one of these splenetic fits when Miss Everett came and finding her very cheerful and good Humoured, she was soon made acquainted with her Cousin's Resentment and Mr. Crabbe's ill manners, false opinions, etc. After walking ourselves into a friendly Mind, we suffered this kind Cousin to put an end to our Contention and we becoming Friends again she became a Friend also and I really do admire her obliging Disposition, her innocent Freedom and her cheerful yet Diffident manners: so now my dear Miss C. you have a fair and I believe full account of my acquaintance with the Goddess at new Sarum and what kind of Devotions I pay there: I was to see them, the Family of Everett, some weeks since but could not; now I can the Elders

are not at Home: I am not impatient, yet I love Miss Everett with a kind of Uncle-like Love, if I were younger I would say Brotherly.—'And with what Love do I love her Cousin'? upon my word I cannot say, with none that one word will explain, certainly not the word *Love* itself.

"Adieu dear Miss Charter: do not forget me! I must now go and take Leave of my Sick and provide for my Absence: the greatest Difficulty I have is to manage that Class of persons who are poor, ignorant, sometimes conceited, yet devout, *suffering* and talking of their Resignation—but this is a very fruitful Subject and must be deferred like ye 2nd part of other Sermons. God preserve my Friend! and I would add, bring her to us, if I dare. I am Dear Miss Charter truly and affectionately yours, GEO. CRABBE.

"P.S.—When we say my Friend Mr. A, or Mrs. B or Miss C, or my Friend the Lord Chancellor! or that good Friend of mine Sir John—and with some Variation of the Phrase and mode of using the Word, many other Expressions might be used—in all which the word FRIEND might mean very, very differently. Even so dear Miss C. do I and you and all use it. Our affections have more Variety than our Language."

The postscript is perhaps a little cryptic. It seems intended to convey that he wished to be regarded in a specially significant way as the *friend* of his correspondent.

* * *

Between the last letter and the next the lonely Rector had his eagerly anticipated holiday at Exmouth with his friends the Longs, and was back at Trowbridge, whence on November 11 he addressed Elizabeth Charter at Seaton, near Axminster, but she had already gone thence to Bishop's Lydeard, near Taunton, whither the

letter was redirected, and where the lady learned how the elderly clergyman was feeling out of conceit with himself and his work as pastor of the flock of the manufacturing town, and did not feel equal to anything more than "dull trifling."

"My dear Madam,—My Days have past in such variety of unpleasant but necessary occupations since my Return to this place that I always grew fatigued and worn out by those things which I was compelled to do, so that I could not indulge in others that might and would have been pleasing, could I have overcome the Reluctance to the first Effort. I begin, no not begin, I continue to regret the loss of my former Leisure and to perceive the Rector of a populous Town, looses much more in Comfort than he gains in Consequence, it is true this must be according to his own Ideas of these things and I can speak only of my own: I know that you and 1 or 2 other obliging and serious Friends may, and probably will observe, that the Duties I complain of ought to be pleasant and to be very frank, this is my Vexation, that they are not. I have read of good and pious Priests who have made it their 'Meat and drink,' their Joy and Delight, to be engaged with all their Hearts and Minds in these Occupations, but I am not, and I am convinced that instructing Ignorance and correcting Vice are not my Talents, at least they do not suit my Turn of Mind and Temper. God forgive me! I am disgusted where I should pity, and want to run away from the Object who expects from me Consolation and Sympathy. I know that this will be thought a very singular method of entertaining a Lady who honours me with her Notice, but that Lady is my Friend and the Subject just then occurring as I was writing to her, she will pardon the Impropriety, if there indeed be any, for she has before known that I can ill disguise the Shades of my Mind, when I am Discoursing

with those whose Kindness and partiality invite my Confidence, though I must not flatter myself that they will be blind to my Faults or pardon Errors merely because they are acknowledged. Come ! I will not be gloomy : I am learning to live alone cheerfully and if, like the Animal who died while they were teaching him to live without Food, I do not expire with Melancholy, while I am in training for Vivacity and Animation ; who knows whether I may not at length acquire Good Humour enough to render the short Journey that I have to take comfortable and easy to me ?

" It was good in you even to think of a Meeting at Exmouth where I should indeed have been happy to see you, and the Day would have been distinguished in my Memory, from the many spent in persuit of Shells of no Value to the Finder, or rather say in persuit of something by which the Mind should be diverted from preying upon itself. For this cause it is that I so complain and so accuse myself, who have such calls for my Exertions and whose Mind might be taken from that Self-devouring Employment by its own proper Duties. I am nevertheless obliged to have Recourse to my old persuits and at Exmouth during the latter part of my Time, I versifyed regularly every Morning and was usually in one Place at one time as regular as a Soldier on Drill. Now indeed this play is interrupted by many a rude call and I have just time to lay my paper aside and smooth my ruffled temper before the business is announced.

" I am vexed that you do not go to Bath, and cannot help it : I am sometimes told that I have many Friends there and am not often without some Engagement : but this is not true ; having Assistance in ye last year, I went to Bath frequently and there I had the Pleasure of seeing you, but if I had not seen you and if Mrs. Norris had not done me the Honour of taking some Notice of me, I should have been much at a loss to know

what Friends I had met in this City of Gaiety and Gladness, and who the good people here mean when they say, you expect your Friends at Bath this Season do you not ?—My Friends ! I might say but I do not : it does a Man no harm when he is supposed to have Friends.

" I have not seen Farley since my Return nor paid any Visit out of Trowbridge : in this Solitude I would beg an early Letter from you if I dared, after [my] ungrateful Delay, but if you knew—but no ! I [hope] you will never know experimentally at least the [state of] that Mind which refuses and avoids its own pleasures : many many times would I have delighted in the very act of writing to a Friend and yet like a Creature spell-bound I seemed as if it were impossible to begin. I am at a loss how to address my L^tr—if not at Seaton, I will conclude that orders are left there. In coming home, my Son, whom I had not seen, and I past each other as both slept at Exeter and took Places in different Coaches in the same office,—I may venture to tell you, but I dare not say to many, how this affected me : I knew that rationally thinking I am not the less likely to see him hereafter, for that accidental missing him, but the Father and the Fool did not feel so and that I am both at times is but too true even to myself. This is a horrid Specimen of what ye Devonshire Coast has done for me, but I am not just now so overcome by this Daemon : there is a Difference between Lowness of Spirits and Dulness of the Understanding : I have not written as I designed and do still purpose to Mr. Bowles : I am pleased with the Reputation of his ' Missionary ' : I have not Scott's ' Waterloo ' ; it is a very difficult Subject, indeed all set Subjects are. Will you forgive all this dull Trifling ? Will you do more and say you forgive, Yours dear Lady truly and gratefully G. CRABBE."

* * *

A fortnight later he wrote again, perhaps on the whole

more cheerfully, though he had evidently been reproached with not having asked Bowles about the lapidary inscription. Again, too, he has had to put up with raillery as to his future, but appears to be more reconciled to his solitary state, and to be turning again to his literary work. In returning to the subject of his correspondent's resolve against marriage, it does not seem fanciful to think that he was not unwilling to convert Elizabeth Charter to a general approval of matrimony as a step towards suggesting himself as a possible mate; though the hesitancy which seems to have characterised him all through this period is shown by his considering the probable result of making new "tyes" on the part of one so old.

"To Taunton then will I direct and yet you are such Rambler that I am in doubt whether you will be found there: be that as it may; Health and Comforts of all Kinds I hope my dear Miss Charter go with you wheresoever you go and with whomsoever you abide, and let me assure you there is much Charity in the Prayer, for I am not without a Portion of Envy and that naturally breeds ill-will; but Warfare of some kind we have with ourselves throughout our Lives, except at some very quiet Intervals, and though I have that Envy I contend not and as I cannot have you in my own Neighbourhood, I will not quarrel with those who have you in theirs. That wicked House! but it must be, you say and I reply that I am sorry for it. Your Letter of the 12th gave me some Pain, I thought it half unkind and I can bear but a small portion of Coldness in those to whom I cannot be cool, and yet perhaps this was unjust. I might appear to you ungrateful and forgetful: happily your second Favour of the 16th which accompanied the former removed my Apprehendsions and I can now

return my Thanks as to a friend who has no Displeasure and who obligingly sympathises with feelings rather too gloomy and oppressive, but which she relieves and enlivens and could I be at any passable Distance but—

" —And what shrewd guesses would my Friend have had ?—you kindly wished to know the Cause of my Silence and after mentioning the Doctor's possible forgetfulness of your Letter, you add that you could meet me with other Guesses more *shrewd*, now your marking the word *Shrewd* and some late Raillery from Mrs. Norris bring the same Train of Ideas into my Mind, and you might possibly conjecture with her that I was so entirely engaged and engrossed by my attentions to one object as to have no Time nor Inclination to devote to my other Friends or to Business of any other Description : I have smiled gravely and soberly smiled at all this and knowing that Defences only create more positive Accusations, I endeavoured to assume Mrs. Norris' own Style though not just then the one my Frame of Mind would have dictated : To you dear Lady if indeed you had any Meaning of the Nature I allude to, I have need of very few words and only beg credit for a plain Assertion, that, my Heart is just as much inspired and entangled by such Objects and such Engagements as the Heart of a Man at my Age ought to be. I think it feels more readily and perhaps more affectionately than experienced Hearts ought to do, but its feelings and Affections are of more temperate and less dangerous Kind,—perhaps you will think there could be no Occasion for such Disavowals of these Attachments in me, but if Ladies will be Accusers, what can I do ? I must laugh or be serious in my Vindication and I laughed with Mrs. Norris and I am serious with you and so forgive me whether you meant as I supposed or not.

" I saw Mr. Bowles at Bowood on the 18th but having just received your letter, I said nothing on the Subject

of Inscriptions : He is a good and pleasant Man and his Verses are like him—not so good Verses as I conceive he is a Man though. The Marquis and his Lady are both affable, obliging and intelligent : I could not spend the Time they were so good as to say they wished and it is one of my Griefs that I could not ; that is, that I am so left as not to be able to quit the place I reside in for more than 2 Days : During the last Winter I had my Sons both Companions and Assistants and they have both left me without Expectation of their Return ; left me to a Solitude which I am not accustomed to and to Servants who better suit Men with stronger Spirits : yet I must not blame these young Men, nor do I, they have no Connections here and their Friends and little Property lie in a different County : At my Decease If Connections were formed at least of common Kind, they would be painful whether preserved or broken off and it may be wisdom to form none. I have some here who pay all the exterior Respect and even Attention I could reasonably desire, but (with ye Exception of one Family) I must not look in Trowbridge for Substitutes for my Sons. Bath is near and were some people at Bath—nay there are some, but were certain Friends assembled even there, though it would not be quite so pleasant as your Idea of lovely Autumnal walks [and] half a Score Friends within a Walk, yet much Good would arise from it, but as a Substitute I apply my dear Miss C. to two Species of Composition, and write at some Hours a Book on Divinity and at others poetical Recollections and there are times when I feel not dissatisfied, for the one is a Duty long fixed in my Mind and the other an Amusement of some standing also and when I am wearied with both these and with myself, I go to a Friend's House, and pass two hours with him a Son and Daughter all good and soberly-agreeable people : to the Daughter indeed I am indebted for Notice which very young Ladies do not often pay to Men who if not

very old are at least about the same Date with their Papas—Now will you forgive all this ?

" How could you do me such Wrong as to think I could be wearied and forgetful of your Favour and the pleasure your Letters afford me : What would you write my dear Miss Charter ? you have too solid an Understanding to be in Love with fine writing or sentimental prose or Verse : You write naturally and with Ease and how should I be wearied with that ?—I will be mindful of your Direction in general. Do not be long before you write and do not care who directs your Letter whether double or like this for I have but one Neighbour in the House of Representatives and he is not at Hand and you will not permit Commutation of different Ways of franking.

And why is not your Opinion of '*Printing Papers, Furniture* and *so forth*' to be valued : Are you determined to have nothing personally, as I may call it, to do with such articles as *Furniture ?* Indeed you should make no such Resolutions : You have witnessed misery and oppression ! so have I, but may not both have seen Comfort and Affection : Affection preserved through Life ? A strong Resolution is half-profession : you would not be a Nun ?—Well, but in sober earnestness let me say as most truly I can, that when I wish to suspend your Determination, it is because I wish your Happiness. If such Engagement will not promote that, may you never enter into one; I know there is uncertainty : there is Comfort, there is Vexation and there is Indifference and if I had room I would give you an Instance of the latter in a fellow Traveller with whom I supped at Exeter, but you see Examples of all kinds—For Heaven's sake do not think me over attentive to my Duty. I will explain at some future Time, but No No I am not exemplary and half my virtue is unavailing Desire—God bless my dear Miss Charter ! I shall be very glad to hear again and again. Yours affectionately & faithfully, Geo. Crabbe.

"P.S.—If you find too much Gloom and Heaviness in my Style even yet, impute it principally to the solitary Life I lead—except on Business I see no one for several Days together and ye Mind gets naturally grave: I shall do better when more accustomed to it. Of Waterloo etc. at some other season."

"Half my virtue is unavailing desire." How sad is the note of the disclaimer of being an exemplary character, suggesting perhaps a somewhat cynical standpoint not usual in the writer.

* * *

It is to be regretted that we have only one side of this correspondence, it would have been pleasant to read the variedly "lively" and serious letters that the lady sent to the poet, but as no mention is made of the friendship in the memoir of Crabbe we are left to conjecture that at some time he destroyed or returned the accumulated correspondence.

Earlier letters have shown that the possession of a house prevented Elizabeth Charter from residing in Bath, and here Crabbe returns to the theme, but when he suggests that his sex is one to "know its own mind" he does not appear to realise himself as among one of the not uncommon exceptions. Again it will be seen he returns to the gossip which was busy providing him with a prospective wife. The letter was written on Boxing Day.

"My dear Madam,—Could you know the Duties of a Residing Rector in a populous Town, unassisted and in a busy Season you would be made acquainted with the Reason of a Silence which I hope does not appear ungrateful: it is true certainly that People are not

born, neither do they die, at any particular Part of the year, but they marry and baptise, and moreover the Priest is thought to be a very churlish Priest if he be not particularly attentive and sociable at certain Seasons. A merry Christmas ! call they it ? No indeed, it is a very troublesome, fatiguing Christmas and I long for the repose of the New Year when the twelfth day tells the superstitious that Holydays are over. Do you know that I am quite in Love with the calm Cheerfulness of your last Letter : it seems to have been written on purpose to console your melancholy Correspondent and I do wonder my dear Miss Charter at your exemplary Patience but I am very grateful for the Virtue so exemplified towards me.

" You observe in the Conclusion of your Letter that you meant it to be lively, and so it is : unforcedly lively, and gives me great Pleasure for it at least appears as if you had some Concern for my dull and vapourish feelings and I would believe you really had if I could be conscious of meriting so much Regard, but Weakness comes across my Vanity and I dare not give way to such Suggestions. Oh ! burn that House that keeps you there, in what is the County ?, Somerset ? but for that I might on my Visit to Bath next week see you and tell you how much I feel myself your Debtor and among other things—but chiefly dear Lady for your Correspondence—I am to thank you for your purpose of bringing me into the Society of the dear Lady whom you have left : I do wish you would come yourself. Sure the next Being who offers to purchase that Dwelling or hire will not be a Lady but of a Sex to know its own Mind—do pardon me, for I am out of humour to be kept from one's Friend by such things as Houses and Ladies' Minds respecting them : ' it was too near the Road ;' confound her Folly, did she not know that before ? and if not, is it not a very good thing to be near a Road ? a Simpleton ! *You* feel disappointed ! I am sure I do :

And do *you* feel now elated ? I thought I saw a vast deal of Stoical Steddiness in you, and I had a good Mind not to like you on that Account and I believe I should not, had I not read a something very prevailing on the other Side, but if you really have these kindred Infirmities, to be sure, it is a great advantage to me and I feel a little more allied to you than if you repelled me by twenty cold Virtues that I know nothing of : now a little kindred Frailty is a pleasant and useful Cement in friendship and one is not kept at such monstrous Distance ; for I thought of that and did not quite feel reconciled to it, when I first became a Candidate for your Good opinion and Moreover somebody said so much of your Virtue and I knew not what, that I shrank backward and said for a Time, Well ! let her and her Virtue go then ! what Alliance have I with such a Being ? but before we parted, I repeat, that tho' I could not trace any peculiar Weakness or comfortable Frailty in you to give my infant Regard any Encouragement, yet on the whole I left you fully convinced, that weak or not weak I should love you as heartily and as long as if you had as many Errors as myself and I knew them, and this is I think a Confession which I never made before.

"I was mortified too when I called and you were gone, I knew not where, with your Cousin, for I wanted to judge again, but I saw you afterwards when that Lady—a Sister was she not ? was with Mrs. Peachey and then I sought no more but we have been good comfortable Friends—at least so far as I know—ever Since, and I believe it grows upon me for I am sure I wish to see you and I do not know whether I did at first—except as I tell you by way of further Enquiry—and I really am in no slight Degree disappointed about that House. I should like to talk and to hear an hundred things one cannot write.

"I give you joy, that is I sympathise with you,

on the news of your Brother: yes, I can honestly say this, and that is some Proof of my Friendship for who cares about People's Brothers? Do not my dear Miss Charter speak of Egotism: I would not give anything for a Letter from a Friend that was not well filled with it: of whom would you write? and you tell me too that your Letters are not Cold or unkind, that is, if I may so construe the Expression, that they are friendly and from the Heart; then dear Lady they are highly Acceptable and most valuable to one who but too often feels himself alone in the World and looks round with many a Sigh to think he has partly outlived and partly removed from all the Companions of his livelier Days.

"What are *my* Resources dear Miss Charter in such Deprivations? Making Verses is an Amusement but it is temporary and soon tires: then I am weak and foolish and perhaps vain and want to be loved and that can hardly be, and mere Respect or cool Esteem is not worth much. No, indeed I tell you the Truth: I imagine you refer to Miss Long whose Family I visit and we sometimes read and in the Summer walked together; we write tho' not frequently, and she being fond of Verses makes me a Judge more than she ought. She collects minerals and that is one of my Amusements and we have been often together in all the Carelessness and let me add Integrity and fair Meaning of Sixty-one and Twenty-six and I dare venture to say you will give me Credit when I repeat that I never thought even for an Instant of this Lady in any View to which a Father could object or what is even more certain, she herself: I do believe that her honest, open kind of behaviour and avowed partiality in which she did me much honour, caused first some jokes void of meaning and then some more foolish because more grave Suggestions. You now will have no Doubts. Mrs. Norris heard that I was even 'jealous of a *female*

Friend,' thank God! there are some Frailties I am not guilty of.

"Do not punish me by long silence: I want to write something of a foolish Correspondence I have been obliged to hold with Mr. Colburn, a publisher in London, respecting a Likeness and what is worse a Memoir of Mr. Crabbe: but I must defer it till I write again. . . . If I were called upon to swear which I loved best and which I thought liked me, the married Lady or the single, I wonder what I should say! 'Pray forbear to ask' I believe would be my Petition and if it were not granted: I should then say 'Give me Time'—All this being not of myself alone I commit to Miss Charter as my Friend and to her Discretion.

"It is very late and I have much to do and here is this wicked Paper soiled and I cannot write again: I did not perceive it, pray pardon me and write frankly and kindly if these two properties of your letter may meet. God preserve you dear Lady. Come to Bath if you can, will you? Accept a thousand good and friendly Wishes and believe me truly and affectionately yours,

"Geo. Crabbe.

"P.S.—I was going to write upon Gilt paper, but it is very *small*. Would Miss Charter prefer it?—Vanity said no and what is more, Reason says it, ought Reason?"

* * *

Thus closes the first year of the correspondence, and leaves the young lady—Elizabeth Charter was now about thirty-three—and the elderly poet who had first met a year or so earlier on the friendliest footing.

The "duties of a residing rector in a populous town" do not appear to have been over-arduous in the matter of sermon-writing, for judging by several of those of Crabbe's sermons which we have seen in manuscript he was in the

habit of repeating them (in the *same church*) at intervals of about two years. One, for instance, is marked as having been delivered at Trowbridge on the following dates: Dec. 24, 1815; Feb. 9, 1817; April 4, 1819; Feb. 4, 1821; and at Pucklechurch (his son's cure) on Oct. 26, 1817. Another is endorsed: Trowbridge, Dec. 10, 1815; Feb. 23, 1817; March 21, 1819; Feb. 4, 1821; May 5, 1831; and Westerleigh, 1817.

A few words should perhaps be said about the Long family to whom Crabbe refers several times, and most pointedly in this letter. The father was Richard Godolphin Long of Rood Ashton—some miles to the south-east of Trowbridge—who was elected Member of Parliament for Wiltshire in 1772. The daughter of whom Crabbe speaks, his Flora—properly Florentina—was at this time but a child of seventeen, having been born about 1798.[1] Her sister, Mrs. Walmesley, was the "married Lady."

[1] She died at Bath in 1862.

CHAPTER VII

LETTERS, 1816

"A mild and modest girl, a gentle friend,
If, as he hoped, her kindness would descend—
But what he feared to lose or hoped to gain
By writing thus, he had been asked in vain."

Tales of the Hall.

THE day after Christmas Day, 1815, Crabbe wrote to Elizabeth Charter, and by the day after New Year's Day of 1816 he was replying to her answer! A remarkable speeding up of the correspondence which was not, however, to be maintained—and seeing the leisurely length of the letters this is scarcely to be wondered at. Distances were much greater in those days, and though Taunton and Trowbridge are but a crow-flight of less than fifty miles apart, that meant a far greater severance than three or four times the distance would mean to-day, and even more than that for cross-country correspondence.

"You flatter me dear Lady, at least you give me very great Pleasure, by your obliging Declarations, in which I will not distress myself by supposing them no more than the common Expressions of Politeness. No! I will believe that Miss Charter was in good, friendly Earnest when she did not *wish* me to be long silent, when she hints that my Paper should be of *proper* Size, when she makes obliging Comparisons and above

all when she mentions that Union of Impatience and Pleasure and connects it with my Letters. And is this the Way, dear, but indiscreet Friend that you Attack the Vanity of a Man, by no means, insensible to the good Opinion of his Correspondent. I now look on your Letters as those of One whom, not Time alone but what Time has brought forth and impressed upon the Mind and thus rendered, what shall I say ? intimate. You will not be offended ? will you ? Indeed I tell you the very truth. You are much more to me than you were when I saw you last and you were of no little Importance then but if I had lost you at that Time ; I should have said, ' there is Miss Charter married and grown weary of writing to me or she is grown weary even without marrying and I am sorry ; for her Letters gave me pleasure and promised me more, when we should have known more of each other ' and I should have felt my Disappointment for a Time and then ceased to feel it, but now, there is that Promise fulfilled and I should not easily nor soon loose the Remembrance of the Pleasure I receive nor the Desire of it.

" Yet how many things are there which we cannot talk of in a Letter, be the Paper ever so comfortable. We must not repeat Grievances for ever. King Charles, was it not, tells us that they should *not* be repeated, but with His Majesty's good leave, I will once more wish that House tenanted, or purchased, or so disposed of that you might come to Bath : by the Way, I have lost my Love for Bath. My last year's Friends not there and the formal Dinner Parties and Evenings—Oh ! my dear Miss Charter what are public Places if you have no private Sharer in your Ideas and Current Opinions about the passing Objects ? Mrs. Norris was to be at Farley but is not yet, nor I believe are the Houltons at Bath themselves : I write like a Skatterbrain but I meant to observe that when the Norris's came, the two Families would be

frequently at Bath and I should of Course be sometimes there too. There are now that Family with which you have, it appears, heard of my Intercourse and a monstrous monstrous Absurdity in consequence: Mrs. Norris was witty upon the Subject; part of the Family were I believe angry, another Part, sorry. I was indignant and more than half resented what was not worth any, and much less a painful Thought. Of what Importance my dear Madam are we not to ourselves? and our Daughters? and our Families? and Connections!! Well! all that, thank Heaven, I can smile at.

"And so you have lost one more of the Tyes that bind us to the World! And what will you do? Will you substitute Another and marry? Let me know if you do in fair Time for me to loose you gradually: I should not like a Surprise, indeed I should not; nor to read, or what is worse to have it read in a Room full of Company, 'Last — was married by — Miss E. C. — to —.' It is true that such a Company, one who knows that I have the Honour of receiving Letters from you, is not easily Collected, for I would not answer that I could hear unmoved and with immoveable Features, such interesting Intelligence, so be you dear Lady communicative yourself, for we do not always remain fixed in our purposes opinions or Resolutions. And Pardon me if I add, that this is very natural. We loose and as you truly observe, 'we ill bear to loose that which long habit makes necessary' and in most cases, we try to *make up to* ourselves our Losses.

"General Peachey and his Lady I remember with—I believe Gratitude is the best Expression: On more than one Occasion, though trifling, the Good Nature of the General was very striking and very pleasing to me: and what is a little Prolixity, (and that good Natured and benevolent) to the Display of genuine Virtue? I love what I know of G. Peachey.

"Yes my dear Miss Charter, I do think Letters take

almost all their Interest from what we call Egotism: of whom can I love to hear if not of my Friend? and by whom if not by herself? Do pray tell me all of Miss Charter that you find in your Heart to tell and never never shall I think it egotism in the vulgar acceptation of the Term. Am I not an Egotist with you? and do I not flatter myself that my Letters are not the worse received? I am of your Uncle's Opinion, indeed I am. I have, (which is very uncommon with me, uncommon to bring *any* Countenance before me: do not mistake: I can *see you* almost when I please,) your Countenance, now before me: and there is none of that Infirmity or Weakness you speak of. Self-Possession is nearly but not entirely my Idea of your Character. I should say, Resignation, not only from Motives of Piety, but from native Capacity for bearing evil. Fitness of Mind to contend with natural and moral Adversities, the Frowns of Fortune and the Attacks of Malevolence.—

"But there is no discussing these things on Paper! Come, come! and let us talk of these and more, our Views in this World, our Views not of this World. I am very solitary. Did I ever tell you of a young Lady here, whom I call and who calls herself my Friend? And she might be, but she is very young and has never felt Sorrow nor left the Wing of Affection. She is of Course disposed to think, notwithstanding what old Fellows observe, that the World is a charming place and the Creatures in it good humoured and generous and kind and happy—and why should I, if I could remove the Veil? No! perhaps it may be done by Time gently. It unfits me however for Conversation. We are not equal, but she is a good young Lady and I see her in her Family with pleasure. My Friend in Wales, (whom I think of with Self-reproach, tho' I believe and hear she is happy) was jealous of this young Maiden, who would have been astonished at the Extravagance of the Opinion;—I believe Miss Ridout is

married? You probably have not known, but being nearer the County of her Connections I conceive you might hear. I have no motive but an earnest wish to know that she lives in Comfort, whom I permitted myself, in the Ballancing my own Mind, to keep in Suspense. Strange! that it could be: but so it was. Perhaps I have observed before in writing to you on this Subject—the only Person to whom I could seriously write of it—that Miss R xx in a Correspondence of considerable Length with her Friend and herself both then unknown personally and her Friend to this day: and these Letters being half poetical, half in earnest, her young Mind began to build a Fairy-Structure upon such slight Foundation and that work of building was so pleasant that neither the age of her Correspondent while his person was kept out of Sight, nor afterwards the person itself could overthrow that strong Edifice that Fancy and Hope had built. It was my Duty to have done that as soon as I perceived it, but I was in some degree caught myself and I need not say, flattered. I am very glad now; to have left a young Widow without provision had been dreadful to me and now if I have said all this before, laugh at and forgive me. Handsome I think is Miss L. she commands some attention I think and raises much Expectation nor does she fail to repay it—Still if I had been 20 years younger and she 10 older, no—but my paper large as it was is exhausted. You will recollect the date of yours, 16th and of mine 23 and take example from me, in one of the few things in which I can be exemplary.

"God preserve you my dear Miss Charter, believe me, truly yours,

"Geo. Crabbe."

The family with which he had intercourse was probably that of the Hoares or the Longs, and presumably the "monstrous monstrous absurdity" was

gossip associating the poet's name with that of the banker's daughter, or else with one of the daughters of the Member of Parliament.

Crabbe was not able long to keep off the question of his "loves"; he still had twinges about the episode with Charlotte Ridout.

* * *

With the next letter (February 26, 1816) comes more definite complaint of ill-health, of inability to sit long at writing, even at the writing of a friendly letter. Though he felt impelled to call upon a friend for pity and sympathy it may be felt that such calls, such repeated insistence upon his health, were not likely to make the friend whose pity was invoked allow that pity to become love.

"We are never pleased with Illness, I believe but I am more than commonly vexed and out of Humour with my Indisposition for it has made me Debtor to my Friends and particularly to you my dear Miss Charter, for I purposed to reply almost immediately to your obliging and flattering Letter of the 7th. Indeed it is most true that I am greatly disappointed if I do not hear from you in what I feel to be a reasonable Time, and I may be surely proud and highly Gratified by finding that you can take likewise some Satisfaction in our Correspondence.

"I have perhaps mentioned to you, the heat and pain in my Head which writing brings on when I am feverish or in any degree indisposed and from about the Day when your Letter reached me, I began to feel the unpleasant Sympton of nervous Fever. In some degree the Things of this World contributed to raise and increase it. I could not sleep and lost a not-yet-recovered Appetite, my Spirits became unnaturally raised and

depressed and my Head on any Application to my Pen and sometimes without, hot and painful. Under these Circumstances, which tho' reduced, remain; my dear Miss Charter will I am sure pardon the apparently ungrateful Delay and not only forgive the Omission but will kindly inform me of the Forgiveness. I have now the Accustomed Warning to leave off my pleasant Occupation and seek Exercise without thinking, an Heat, not occupying a space larger than that a Ring would cover, fixes on my Head, on my Brain I probably should say, and were I to write long and rapidly this would augment till it covered a large space, or rather left none uncovered, but I will not amuse you with the Progress of my malady. I must walk it off and then——

"This is dull Reading for you my dear Lady and you need a more lively Correspondent than one so nervous and pensively disposed. I will not any further persue my Arguments or Assertions respecting your Fortitude or Resignation: you shall disclaim what Virtues or Merits you please, allowing me to retain my own Opinions and I suspect very strongly that we differ in very little more than Words. I did not suppose that you were of impenetrable spirit, that you had Resistance in all Cases of Affliction and could hold Grief at Arms-Length and smile soberly on the anguish of it: I believed that you bear Sorrow rightly and I believe it still: there may be something of the more or less in the Submission you feel and in the Difficulty of making your Will obedient to the Will of God, or rather resigning that Will of your own, and bearing the apparent Evils as parts of the Divine Will, but though I may have believed that you had less Difficulty in these Contentions and Efforts than you really have, yet surely I am Correct with Respect to the Endeavour and I can but think, to the Success also. . . . If you please say nothing of the . . . yet she would imagine love to have it known that I talked to a Friend on the Subject, for she is a

stranger to Miss Charter's Goodness and one wd. think by asking her Silence, I was so too, but I am not. I will not detain this my Apology, for I will not call it a Letter, till another post day. There was given in Colburn's Monthly Magazine Museum, or some such Title a figure very unlike as I conceive of me and a kind of Memoir which at his request and fearing what would be done if I did not do it, I supplied. I have it not by me, but wait . . .

" I direct to Lynchfield not doubting that a Letter will reach you whether you be there or not. Pardon me for writing of my Complaints and my Trials. We shall meet one day and talk of them and many many more subjects. Heaven preserve dear Miss Charter. Write soon. Your affectionate servt,

" G. Crabbe."

* * *

The next letter is but fragmentary and undated, yet internal evidence shows that it belongs to the spring of 1816, for in her reply (as we learn from the next letter) Miss Charter seems to have resented the imputation of pride, and appears also to have said that it was quite impossible for her and her sister to visit Trowbridge parsonage—apparently on the grounds of " what would people think," for though the poet-parson might not worry about the " growling of the Public, the virtuous monster " his correspondent evidently did.

" . . . did I not ?, to give me notice . . . likely to select some Gentleman and sit down with him in the social state of wedlock, and did I not fully imply, nay promise that I would do that which I asked. I knew that married Ladies (always excepting my dear Mrs. Norris) did not use to write as they were accustomed in their Spinster state and therefore as your letters gave me pleasure I was willing to have timely Notice when

I must relinquish the Good I had been favoured with, and do you think I had not Vanity enough to suppose . . .

"By the Way can you give me any short stories, especially of Ghosts and Apparitions, but they must be singular and brief or I cannot versify them and they will be untractable if long . . . you perceive that I have recovered my spirits, at least that they fluctuate as poor Cowper's, who (do they not tell us ?) went to Bed weeping over his Soul's irrevocable misery and in the morning before he rose, made the ballad of John Gilpin. Has not your Cousin some versifyable anecdotes ? Now do not wonder at my eagerness for these things, for here I have pledged myself (Idiot as I am) to compose another Book, to compose my Readers you will say if you be disposed to be out of humour with me. —And why would you not come to Bath ? You are very perverse dear Lady and then too about your letters do pray be quiet and write and leave me to do with the writing according to my sovereign will and pleasure. I do not burn, nor tear in pieces, nor run them through the body and hang them on files like letters from the Taylor or Shoemaker, but I imprison them and lock them altogether in a stronghold, where nobody is suffered to visit them but their Jailer and so have done if you please with this subject which Miss R[idout] brought to mind.

"'But why at Trowbridge ?' will you say and not in Hampshire with Mrs. Norris ? And I might say 'why not in Bath with Miss Charter ?' Because things in this world go I tell you perversely. Just as I was setting forth and my servant had directions for ye journey, a dear lady who had been ever kind to me since I have been Minister of this place, was pronounced by her Physician not merely to be in Danger, from what was supposed a common cold, but that there was reason to think the lungs affected and every Day has

confirmed his opinion. In this apprehendsion I stated my situation to him and he fairly told me that if it would be pain to be absent, when his Patient might need her Minister (and that Minister a friend) he would not advise me to commence the journey, and so dear Lady I am yet at Trowbridge, and I pray you do not forget [that] I am, and that letters from my friends are highly acceptable. 'Hem, how many friends ?' one gentleman and three ladies. Do I not answer all your questions with the utmost frankness ?

"I have not seen General Peachey and indeed I am almost afraid to go to Bath. 'What is self denial good for Miss Charter if it leads to nothing except the mortifying your friends ?' Relieving your sister ! Why do you not both come ? Why cannot you both come and visit me for a month or two ? It would be great charity and I suppose that great Blockhead the public would not growl, would it ? Our gravity considered ? I do not know your sister do I ? Nor she me ? Can you introduce me, or is she more distant and prouder than you are ? If so, she is too much ; you have not too little of these chilly qualifications have you ? Come ! I will not leave off with impertinence ! I have a great opinion of you and write in hope of receiving letters and that I cannot often say truly—truly I can say that I am affectionately yours George Crabbe. No ! I had no medical advice. 18th. You know Mesdames the Dumbletons do you not ? I should like to learn your Sentiments of some of my Bath friends if I could, and indeed of some of my friends in Trowbridge, One of whom is much more likely to take upon herself the Government of the Parsonage than the young Lady you mention and I scarcely know at certain times whether to rejoice or be sorry that Fortune has placed an insurmountable obstacle in my way, at least one very difficult unless I was more alive and in earnest."

The new book that Crabbe had "pledged" himself to complete was the "Tales of the Hall." How he had pledged himself—except to himself—is not easy to guess, for it was not until the autumn of 1818 that negotiations were definitely entered into for their publication.

* * *

The next letter was dated from Trowbridge on May Day.

"Indeed I am very much ashamed of my Freedom, and wonder in what Humour I found myself when I took the Liberty to talk of your Pride: Whatever Degree or kind of it you may possess, certainly I have not experienced its Severity: I have not smarted under the Exercise of its Resentment. Dear Lady forgive me, and I think you also require something like forgiveness when you let a Wish escape you for Insensibility: you would be Ice and Marble, never melting I suppose, never softened: you are very naughty for such wish is rebellious, but have you indeed suffered so much by Sensibility as to be quite wearied by your feelings? Do not let me think it: painful as it is, it is surely best to feel, altho' under the immediate Exercise and Discipline of the feelings we may be allowed to utter something like a prayer for Firmness: under the Laceration of the Nerves philosophy herself may admit a sigh for Rest; but not even then, to be Ice or Marble.

"Yes, indeed, I know the growling of the public: the virtuous Monster, so delicate in its Apprehendsions, so severe in its Judgment and so depraved in its own Indulgences. I have an inveterate quarrel with it, for I do so very much want a visiting-Consoler in this cold Region of Solitude where I sit and look so often at my silent Friends, who with all their Varieties tire me out and I want anxiously the living Conversation that Books cannot give. I must cease too to talk of Bath for I

perceive you will not Come and your House is so far: you describe your Delay very feelingly dear Lady, but the dreaded Operation being over I trust you will sit down in the newly furnished Dwelling in that comfortable and companionable Frame of Mind that Alas! I try for and do not gain possession of, save by Fits and at Intervals when all places become alike and consequently the Parsonage at Trowbridge as pleasant as any other.

"I will encourage the Hope of seeing you and the Lady your Sister to whom you promise me an Introduction—that I shall like your Sister or any Sister whom you like may I think be taken as granted, but not particularly for Steddiness, unless as People are said to love in another what they want in themselves, and so they account for the unmatchable Qualities of Lovers and married people: Whatever Opposition there may be in exterior points you will not readily induce me to credit any other, nor am I quite in a good humour with that dark Shade in which you throw your own Character. Other people are better Judges. You appear my dear Miss Charter to have set before you a picture of perfection and finding that in Comparison you have certain Defects and Redundances, you become severe and judge unmercifully where thank God your Friends have a very different Way of deciding.

"Certainly I felt myself much interested when you mentioned your Sister's State of Health and the Probability of your being at Bath, and I trust I have Virtue enough to rejoice in the Cause of my Disappointment however I may in other Respects feel it. I go seldom thither. Mr. and Mrs. Norris will expect me about the 12th–16th of the present Month at Hawley and yet my poor patient, is living here and sometimes in her Wishes for Life, indulges a faint View of recovery and this I own grieves me, tho' it does not surprise, for Mrs. By-the-Sea had a very smiling prospect, an Husband tenderly and long attached: a desirable Situation:

Wealth enough: few Connections that required her Care and many who administered to her Comforts: Alas! Life clings very closely under such Circumstances, and even where the View is not so fair, the Darkness of one Prospect makes the Dubiousness of the other desirable and Life, at its latter End becomes comparatively good and pleasant. Here is a Friend who sometimes calls and talks of what we all hope and fear and he says 'Did we believe as some say they do, the Business of the World would all be thrown aside, pleasure would be no persuit: Friendships and Enmities would never be contracted and all our Views and Wishes would be perpetually directed to that future of which it is plain that with all our faith we now so much doubt and disbelieve.' There is doubtless some Truth in this, but it is not entirely true: I do suppose that some have so believed and had that perfect Faith, who yet have engaged in this World's persuits, but not so eagerly: Alas! I feel the lamentable Deficiency, that even still I am vexed by cares which I ought to be above and by the Incidents and Occurrences that should be but the gentlest Exercise for Reason and Virtue and which the higher and greater Views of the Christian should render not bearable only but easy—now forgive me this: poor Mrs. B. makes me grave, and was it Gravity of good and useful Kind all would be well. . . . Let the Letters rest dear Lady in their comfortable Home where no Creature molests them. You shall command all that Reason would and even more and in this very wish of yours I am disposed to Obedience, but not immediate so let us Compromise and do Justice on both Sides, yet why this Hurry? I am indebted to you for the Anecdotes of Waterloo and that horrid relation of the young Lady and the Skeleton, a Story by no means incredible and one wh. those who are adicted [*sic*] to practical Jokes ought to be acquainted with.—You have probably heard one, if

possible worse, how causing Terror by phosphorous at Midnight, etc.,—I had a good Mind, a great Mind rather, to attempt the Story but have hitherto declined the Undertaking—the Story of the Bride is another of those which strange as it may appear, I call too interesting for Poetry, that is unmixed with anything that call[s] off the Mind from its pain, but they all afford Groundwork if one had Time and Courage. You flatter me, at least I am sure you please me by continuing to write in the obliging way that soothes a man's Self love and makes him believe that his Correspondence is what his wisdom would tell him it cannot be. Still if you continue to read, it shall be sufficient and command at least Thanks and punctuality.

"Though I think the Story of the locked-up Bride best told in the fewest words possible, that is, in your own Way, yet by some Modification which I have been meditating this morning it appears to me more manageable than it did: if I can succeed with it, I will mention it no more but place it among my Mass of *Materials;* but if I cannot, I will show you my failture [*sic*]. The great difficulty lies in this, that such Incident must be the principal one and yet the Mind must not be left with lacerated feelings. Who c[d] make a Story from the 'Black Hole of Calcutta'? For these Relations Accept my best Thanks and for your friendly purpose of procuring me more. . . .

"You kindly enquire after poor Mrs. By-the-Sea: as I have said, she is going and even rapidly, but the medical people are almost cruel in trying so much to do Impossibilities and awaking such perishable Hopes —I do not see her *yet* in Comfort—Mrs. Norris will expect me soon and I know not how to act. I am sorry for your Loss and can estimate, for I knew your Cousin, the Value of his Company. If I thought that quarrelling with you would procure me long Letters I would almost venture to do it and indeed you deserve a little Rebuke,

do you not? for so writing of Patience and Excuses and Length of your Letters. Pray dear Miss Charter forbear—be assured that you afford me pleasure—I sometimes feel sorry for the Distances but ever glad that I met you. I remember you among the few whom it has pleased Heaven to give me and to leave. God preserve you Dear Lady and yours all. Ever believe me, respectfully & affectionately yours,

"G. CRABBE."

"If you will say something very smart and elegant to your Sister, and do it as from me and in my Name, what a Friend you will be? but from myself, I have only a few plain Words, viz. that I think of her high as your Sister and from your Letters and Sincerely wish for ye Happiness of meeting her."

The sister of Elizabeth Charter who lived with her was Louise.

Why Crabbe should have had an "inveterate quarrel" with the public it is not easy to determine, unless it was with the local public of Trowbridge owing to there remaining perhaps still some lingering feeling in favour of the man whom he had superseded. That the wider public appreciated his work as poet is to be gathered from the considerable sum which John Murray saw fit to pay him some time later for a collected edition of his works.

Who the quaintly named Mrs. By-the-Sea was is not now ascertainable.

The remark about letting the letters rest "where no creature molests them" is cryptic, unless it is to be interpreted that Elizabeth Charter had asked that the letters she wrote to the poet should not be kept.

* * *

There is a gap of several weeks before the next letter (July 18, 1816), in which Crabbe explains and apologises for his delay, and appears to reproach his friend for a want of spontaneity or of egotism in her letters to him. He is seemingly anxious to find out whether she is engaged, or is likely to be, when he says, "you do then admit Men-Visitors."

"Now would I give something to which I affixed no small Value, could I know whether you cared for or even recollected my Silence and the Time which has elapsed since I received the Letter you last favoured me with: Have you ever said 'Mr. Crabbe appears forgetful of the Honour done him?' Have you ever, when the Post-man came, felt anything like either a Moment's Concern or Displeasure for this apparent Ingratitude? this I cannot know, but I do most earnestly assure you that I have Claim to your Pardon. I was, of necessity absent for some Days: a Letter vexatious and important from a far-distant Sister deeply engaged me. Poor Mrs. Bythesea required the last Attentions a Friend and Minister could pay and her Funeral also made my Attendance necessary: Add to this the presence of a Friend who visited me, almost unexpectedly and from all these make my Apology and if you cannot, generously forgive: I do not say that I could not have written, but I can say that my Mind has been perpetually engaged. I am now more free. Letters have past between me and my Relations that give some Satisfaction, my Friend is departed. Mrs. Bythesea no more claims my Thoughts or Attendance, and tho' preparing for another Absent week or two I am yet at Trowbridge and can with more leisure ask Miss Charter to forgive my Silence and to write herself.

"You surely do not believe, whatever you appear to suggest that your Correspondence can be in-

GEORGE CRABBE

(From a sketch, taken in 1826, in the collection of A. M. Broadley.)

different : I would quarrel if I could believe it. I am certainly glad that you love to receive Letters for then I may hope mine are acceptable and yet I must not flatter myself that there is in them anything that can interest you. I want to see you and should most gladly approach that Glass-Door fearless of Prudery or Coldness within ; yet I must not flatter myself with any speedy realization of my Dream, for I have allowed my Imagination to wander. I did indeed hope to prevail upon my Friends here to go to some Place on the Devonshire Coast and to leave them awhile at Taunton while I paid my respects to those other Friends, if your Sister will permit me to include her in that Number, whom I so much desire to meet, but I cannot answer for the nervous Versatility of Mind in one here, whom I highly esteem and should be glad to Accompany : this is yet in Debate, but even be this decided as it may I do not despair of travelling Southward and resting in that Place which interested me before I knew that you were dwelling near to it. I hope my dear Madam all is well with you : all cheerful : all happy. I believe we should accommodate our Opinions respecting the general Reluctance of even considerate persons to die without much difficulty : I admit what you observe but still want of sincere and strong Reliance in the future is I think the leading cause. Were our faith perfect, all would give way to that presiding Hope, that great commanding Prospect : Even the aweful Apprehendsions of the reflecting Christian would yield to the glorious Idea of ever-during Existence. When thoughts of the fate of those near to me enter my Mind, I confess I banish them as quickly as I can, leaving this mysterious Subject as unrevealed and inexplicable. God is good I say and think no more, that is I dare not think. Those Devotees whom you mention have assuredly Faith of the strongest Kind and how that may Avail them we know not, but when such wonderful Self-

denial is unaccompanied by the moral and better Qualities of the Heart and Mind, I feel no lively hope for their future destination nor respect for their present Forbearance, wonderful as it is. I have understood that the burning of Widows is not always voluntary, but I will not proceed in so melancholy a Subject.

"I have left my Friends from Farley. Mrs. Norris writes for me and I purpose to attend to her Command; I have a call into Suffolk which I must obey and Business waits me in London: I will therefore in my next give myself the Consequence of sending my Address. I have received from a Lady at Bath a woeful Relation of a recent Connection, terminating suddenly and tragically and I am trying if I can make anything of it, but fear it is too complicated and loaded with Incident. I am promised also a Ghost Story but I fear that one striking and new will not be readily communicated; for there must be something very remarkable to ballance the Incredulity we naturally feel on such Occasions.

"You do then admit Men-Visitors, who are not Relatives! That is obliging, but shall I not hear, shall I not read that of these Visitors, two were found who not only made their Way to the Cottage—for so you call it—but who became Masters of it and made their Residence perpetual, or that they bore Away the Ladies in Triumph and left the Convent empty? Now you must give me Notice, you know, of such Event, lest I should find either no Inhabitant, or more than I expected. I am the rather disposed thus to think, for even at my Time of Life, I am not enamoured of Solitude, but fly to my good old Friend and at his Fire-side (Fireside in July) Avoid the Pensiveness of my Silent Habitation and interest myself in the little anecdotes of domestic Nature, that bring me once more into the Society of my fellow Triflers and take me from the Melancholy and Monotony of a Life like his who has the command of three or four Servants, whose voices alone

break in upon his Meditations.—Yet at times Solitude is good and even pleasing, but there are times when the Spirit requires a Fellow Spirit to think, to feel, to rejoice and to mourn with it. Two years nearly have past since I sought that Spirit in the form of a Lady, too young and too handsome for my Associate, and yet there are moments when I say—of what was I afraid? and what Good has the Fear done me? You will say to your Sister—'This Man is amazingly dull, why do I continue to converse with him?' and she will reply, for she is willing to think favourably 'He will amuse you more when he knows you better and is acquainted with the Subjects which best please you: you should let him see what they are: He is willing to write on your Ideas if you will be frank and communicative: but he knows not how you are engaged. What persons, what Books, what Subjects, nay what kind of persons interest and please you: try him a little longer and then if he does no better discard him.' Is this your Sister's advice? or did my Conscience suggest it? I have not seen Southey's 'Waterloo' but I will see it.

"Now be good and write soon while I am at Trowbridge.

"Your ever obliged & obed^{t} G. CRABBE."

The promised project of visiting Taunton was not carried out, though the visit to the Norrises was.

* * *

The next letter is an undated one, but was evidently written from Sidmouth towards the end of September (1816), after the Norris visit had been paid, and the business trip to London and the family excursion into Suffolk had been undertaken. Incidentally, too, it may be mentioned that he had visited his new friends, the

Hoares, at Hampstead, though it was to be some months before he was to tell Elizabeth Charter of this notable addition to his circle.

"I had the Pleasure of receiving a Letter from you my dear Madam as I was about to leave Trowbridge, and I said, it will be a delightful Employment for me in some half hour when I am on my Journey and will take from my Spirits the weight that generally lies upon them in feeling myself Alone: Alone! so far as the Inhabitants of this World are concerned, for Alone? seriously speaking I cannot think myself and gloomy indeed must be the Mind of them who can believe themselves possessed of that dreadful Independency. Under this promise to myself and purpose of writing I left Wiltshire and without any material impediment reached Hawley House the Seat of my Friends Mrs. and Mr. Norris whom I met in their Evening Walk and with whom I passed five Days in Comfort when by ourselves and pleasantly when in the Parties they can there form: there the Clergy, Tutors to the Young Men of the neighbouring Military College, are in general Men of cultivated Minds united to Women of Agreeable Manners. I was much pleased, but Mrs. Norris allowed me no Time for my peculiar Engagements, I was her Guest and at her Command. After Introductions to some Persons pleasant and to some of whom pleasantry is not y^e^ Characteristic and being Witness to the domestic Virtues of my Friend, her Sunday Efforts and benevolent Exertions, a journey into and thro' Wales was projected, but I had previously engaged myself to Friends then on their Way to this Place; yet something like Compromise was attempted and we parted with the Hope (at least on my Side) of meeting again: still your obliging Letter had no Reply: Something filled up the Day, something the Mind and yet I can truly, honestly say that my Debt to you perpetually occurred

and ever brought Pleasure with it. I went on to London with my Friends, who indeed took me thither and we parted at their Hotel wh they left, to proceed on their Tour the next Morning. Business principally with Mr. Hatchard my Publisher, engaged me for 3 or 4 Days and Calls on Friends or Substitutes for Friends filled up the void space of the 24 hours. This over I hastened to Beccles a Town in Suffolk on the Borders of the adjoining County and there met my two Sons and their Mother's Family. All there was Condolence and Congratulation and one of the Subjects of the latter a projected Marriage of my younger Son with a young Lady of the Place and never, so far as I can now judge, saw I two young People more affectionately bound to each other: indeed knowing the Young Man's Warmth of Temper and Tenderness of Heart, his Strength of Affection and Ardency of feeling I am alarmed lest an Impediment should Arise, tho' it appeared as if my Presence and Consent were alone wanted. Of that they might be pretty well assured: nothing but Defect of Character and Evidence of Impropriety and Immorality on either part would make me a Divider of two youthful and affectionate Spirits and of these Evils I saw none. They will I believe marry and I hope—for a while—reside with me. This dear Miss Charter considerably engaged my Mind and my elder Son in Another Way took up my Attention. From these Scenes of mingled Hope, Comfort and some mingled Sensations of pain and pleasure I was called to Aldborough in ye same County where my Sister dwells with three Daughters a Son and Husband: I must not, Friends as we are! No! I must not call upon you to share in Family Distress and I will therefore inform you of this and no more that my poor Sister a virtuous, and happily for her a religious Character, meets in her latter Days a great portion of the Severer Calamities of Life. If you were to consider what a Wife and Mother may suffer

and what Disappointments they may feel, you might judge of the State of Mind I would describe to you. 5 Days I stayed with this dear Mourner and not once could I bend my Mind to write to Miss Charter. No! said I! that requires Ease, Comfort, Leisure—And where are they? A few Days since I parted with my Sister and returned to Town when Accident presented to me a Friend, the Captain of an East India Ship, and with him I past 2 Days, leaving him for this Place in which I find my dear Friends the Family whom I expected and engaged to meet and whom I left this evening early to write to and thank my dear and obliging Friend Miss Charter, to beg her Forgiveness if she thinks I have been guilty of delay and to assure her y^{t} no Place, nor Company, no Engagements nor Avocation can take from my Mind the Debt I owe to her, or the pleasure of paying it.

"And now my dear Lady judge me with kindness; my frequent Removals and unsettled State, my Meetings and parting, the Family Concerns, the Claims of Sons and Sister and the Solicitation of Friends and Acquaintance and you will, I am sure you will, have a pardon ready to be signed and sealed.

"And how is my Friend? how your Sister? I wonder if I can see you! Will you admit me? We are at present going, that is purposing to go, to Dawlish on the Devonshire Coast and there we shall probably stay long enough for us to receive Letters from any of our Friends who will favour us with their good Wishes. And is there anything I should have replied to and do not? I have not your Letter, but I wish that I had. Your Orders are very severe: blame, a little blame yourself if I do not carry in my Mind the every Expression, yet be assured that I am not insensible [to] the favour you do me; indeed I am not and am grateful for the [great] Pleasure you give me. Here are many people—Walkers, Raflers, Players at Bagatelle, Readers

of light Summer Reading,—Preachers of Warm and elevating doctrines and all the Tribe of Visitors at Watering Places on the Coast, which are numerous and plentifully attended.

" Would that I could call at Norman [i.e. Norton] Cottage ! I will enquire, but I fear that the measure is impracticable, yet I anxiously desire to see you and should love to see your Sister but she will say ' What, this Man ?—how could you think of him Eliza but as of a Rhymer ? '

" What further I was putting into your Sister's Heart to think of me I now do not recollect : It became very dark as the Writing must indicate. Time is not allowed me nor Space to tell you of my Adventures here where I intended to rest unknown, but my ill stars or perhaps my Want of Care soon deprived me of that Privilege and a Lady from Exmouth tells me she had no Difficulty in tracing me to the Lodging of a Friend with whom I now am. I hope you are not called upon to sympathise, as an Individual, I mean with any other than the general feeling for the Loss at Algiers. The particulars have not yet reached us and this Tuesday is what Monday is in Trowbridge, void of news—this is really a charming Place and some of the Cottages quite paradisaical, tho' I am by no means convinced that exquisitely pleasant Views like some of these are cheerful. They appear too good for this Earth of ours and not to belong to it. To-morrow our party embarks for Dawlish !—if you should write—but you will say I do not deserve it and yet if you knew all. I am with three good young Ladies—I think as I said of the Views, almost too good : I know what you will reply but I will tell you nevertheless that I have the same objection to you : If I knew half a dozen faults we should be more upon an Equality. Adieu dear Madam, believe me truly, faithfully, Geo. Crabbe."

* * *

Why Crabbe's proposed visit to Norton Cottage did not take place on his journey from Dawlish home to Trowbridge he explains in his next letter (October 12, 1816) once more apologetically, the explanation being however, it must be admitted, a trifle thin. Had his determination been as strong as the expression of his wishes he would no doubt have found out the way. The rumours of his courting it will be seen had now become more definite, and when he returned to Trowbridge he was apparently expected to be bringing back one of the agreeable young ladies as Mrs. Crabbe ! The family he was with was probably that of the Longs or of the Waldrons, the Trowbridge people with whom he seems to have been on the most cordial footing. The lady who " might if she pleased " make him change his reluctant resolutions against remarriage must surely have been the lady whom he was addressing. How she responded to the hint is left to surmise.

" It was my Purpose, it was indeed my earnest Wish to stop at Taunton in my way from Dawlish to this place where I am now endeavouring to resign myself to my usual Occupations, but the Family I was domesticated with had determined on our continuing together untill we should reach our Homes and the Carriage which we possessed went with too much rapidity to allow even a few minutes Delay. I was mortified, but the Advantage to me of my younger Friends and their Attentions which I knew not how to relinquish, made me accede to their proposal and indeed made me thankful, though with this Drawback on the Satisfaction: on the 5th of this Month I terminated my Excursion, one that contained more Variety than I recollect to have found in any previous two months of a Life, not the most uniform and Stationary, but though there was

Variety there often was a want of feeling and I missed a vast deal of that Intensity of Enjoyment that earlier life affords us. And so it should be: it would be a dreadful Thing if People upon the verge of the Grave felt as those who are entering the World.

"Yes, I repeat the three young Ladies were 'good and agreeable': good, comparitively [*sic*], good in the Sense we usually take the Word: not critically speaking nor religiously; and Agreeable according to my Sense, that is unaffected, easy to be with, not expecting too much, yet knowing what is due; educated but not displaying! Will this be Explanation sufficient for 'good & agreeable' but there is nothing in this surely that would make Miss Charter's Letters less welcome than at any other time when these Ladies were not present, if she thinks so she must have a very poor and very unjust Opinion of herself. These young Ladies made the house of my Friend and me a Scene of Comfort and took off all Domestic cares and made pleasant the Walks and small Excursions of the places we visited and I felt a due portion of Gratitude; but you shall hear no more of it, only I wish you to understand that I can be grateful.

"I admit the Beauty of the Cottages at Sidmouth but I preferred Dawlish and yet even Dawlish became too full for me. One Beauty of these places is Retirement, and when I came to be acquainted with three Families I wanted another place. Liberty in some degree is gone and always abridged. I love my Friends at Home, at Bath, in Town, but in these places we do not go, at least I do not, to dine, to play whist, to hear Music or form parties: so I should like to join two or three at first and then go as unsociable Pilgrims from Scene to Scene.

"Every one thought as you did. I heard everywhere that I was married, and my Friends told me the News when we met. I imagine the Report originated in my Son's virtuous purpose, at least I gave no cause for it.

Miss R x x I hear not of and Miss Charter should assuredly know it, if my Mind varied from its present mode of thinking and especially if it fixed on so adventurous a business, for do you not tell me that you likewise will be communicative ? and have you not a Right to a like Share of my confidence ? I do own to you that my house has been so unlike an Home and my domestic affairs so ill arranged that I have even for Comfort's Sake and Ease thought something about an Alteration but a little sober Reflection and the Consideration of the Rapidity of Time and the little of it to which I can look, have made me sensible that a Wife of my Son is more likely to make my House comfortable than a wife of my own.

" I will however acknowledge that there is a Lady who might, if she pleased, make dreadful war upon my Resolutions, but she will keep within the Boundary of Friendship and tho' I sometimes murmur, I always approve.

" And so you feel for Nephews and engaging Boys ! Well ! I will not condemn, but Miss Charter knows that even our most amiable affections need our watchfulness, but you [say] that you do try not to love him too well —it will depend a great deal upon your way of trying : not by direct Opposition, for why should not a dear Child who is engaging ; engage ? the Object of our affections will be affecting : It is I believe the diverting the thoughts into another Channel frequently and that full reliance on the wisdom and Goodness of the All-directing power to which you well know how to submit.

" By this Time I trust you have heard of your Friend whose life you were doubtful of.

" Are we likely to see you at Bath ? Will the Peacheys come ? They are extremely obliging and with them I saw you, so far they must be interesting to me ! Know you aught of a Family of the Dean of Rapho, Allotts ?[1]

[1] Very Rev. Richard Allot, Dean of Raphoe by letters patent July 10, 1795. Died 1832.

They were at Dawlish ; whither came the Dumbletons and a Scotch Gentleman of much consequence in his Country, Chisholm by name. All these were most obliging and Miss Allott appears like a Lady determined to be in good Humour with all things, so far as I can see from the best Motives, but our Acquaintance was very short.

"And now I have contrived to write my usual Quantity and told you nothing, tell me you excuse it and that you and your Sister (to that Sister pray let me be mentioned with sincere and strong wishes to see her with you) are quite well and then we shall go on smoothly, for I repeat that you must not give me up now, and with Respect to my Connections and young Ladies or Ladies not young, you shall faithfully hear of them all and so pray attend to no Reports nor to any Conjectures. When you form your purpose—whether with a young priest who is a rational Being and conversable and near at Hand or with any other whom you describe not—I trust to your own communication, and till I receive that you are Miss Charter to me. So this is settled. I miss Colonel and Mrs. Houlton especially on a Return home : Trowbridge affords conversable people but not very sociable and there is no Lady in the neighbourhood who is a ' pleasant Quarter of an Hour's walk from me ' —Well ! be honest and let me know all that is knowable —Seriously. Accept my Thanks and the best wishes of my Heart. Think of me sometimes and write and believe me truly and faithfully and affectionately yours, Geo. Crabbe."

The Miss Allot, daughter of the Dean of Raphoe, whom Crabbe met at Dawlish, was the one of whom he wrote to Mrs. Leadbeater : "There is a daughter there I am much disposed to love, and I believe she is not much indisposed to return my affection." Truly was the elderly poet an impressionable person ; apparently he

sought to disarm any jealousy which Elizabeth Charter might feel of other " female friends " by frankness.

Colonel and Mrs. Houlton, whose absence accentuated the loneliness of the poet on his return to Trowbridge, had gone abroad, as a long letter from him to them at Brussels in August of this year shows. They had perhaps been drawn, as had other English people, to go and visit the scene of the great battle of the previous year, the " first and last of fields . . . the deadly Waterloo."

CHAPTER VIII

LETTERS, 1817

"But may I, ought I not the friend to be
Of one who feels this fond regard for me?"
Tales of the Hall.

WITH the beginning of 1817 Crabbe's immediate surroundings became pleasanter, for then his younger son married[1] and came to Trowbridge to reside in the Rectory and to act as his father's curate. There was less of loneliness in the Rectory, and the Rector could indulge in his sentimentalisings with less urgent thought of the difference there would be with a woman in the place—that woman whose happy privilege it is to make a mere house into a home. Though he notes the change for the better in his surroundings, he is still worried by the state of his health, "still over ready to enlarge upon his symptoms." His correspondent was away from home—at Godalming, in Surrey—still avoiding that Bath in which Crabbe was ever hoping to renew personal association—and thither he addressed her on February 11, 1817.

"Accept my best Thanks my dear and obliging Friend for your Congratulations on the enlargement of

[1] John Waldron Crabbe (1787–1840) had married Anna Maria Crowfoot, daughter of a Beccles doctor, on December 2, 1816. John Crabbe's middle name being Waldron, and the Trowbridge friends being Waldron also might suggest early acquaintance between the families. It appears however to be a case of mere coincidence.

my Family, Family indeed before, I could scarcely term it; but believe me dear Lady, neither that Increase of my domestic engagements nor even the press of parochial Business which devolves upon me in these Times when one part of my Parishioners are called upon to take Care of the other part, nor the arrival of some Friends at Bath, and my Attempts, not always successful to be with them.

"None of these, though Occasions of some delay, so much prevent my Writing as that pain and Heat in my Head of which I have probably acquainted you. I cannot of late set down half an Hour and write with any degree of Earnestness before I feel a sensation first of not unpleasant Warmth and soon after of very painful Burning in the fore part of my Head and sometimes entirely over it, occasioned I imagine by the fulness of the Blood Vessels and the Accession of Blood to that Part, which how an Act of the Mind should cause I do not know but perpetually feel that it does and always in proportion to the Attention I give: I suppose that I must take the Advice which has been given me and apply Leeches, though as I perceive this complaint more particularly affects me when I am *otherwise* indisposed, I may hope that a care for my General Health will be my best Remedy: I ought to ask your Pardon probably for this and yet I will not: You will accept it as a Reason for my putting off the Pleasure of writing to you and will excuse my being particular, for I will flatter myself that you will not be indifferent on the Subject, and in this I judge as I would be judged by you, for indeed I feel for your Cold and your necessity of sitting aloof from your Friends and I earnestly hope that long before this time you have joined the Circle you are with, giving and receiving the Satisfaction that Friends only can impart.

"I had hoped that Bath might be in your Contemplation where I had anticipated the Pleasure of meeting

you : I have been there but twice for a long season, but hope to go again as soon as our immediate attention to our poor people may be slackened. Of General Peachey's Arrival I enquired but heard nothing. My parties were principally a family from Hampstead, Mr., Mrs. & Miss Hoare, he a Banker of whom most monied people have heard but not being one of that class my acquaintance commenced with the female part of the Family in the last year and was occasioned by the partiality of the Lady, the Elder I mean, who expressed a wish to Mr. Warner, a Bath Clergyman to see me, and being a very obliging and entertaining Lady, I very cheerfully entered into her views : I saw them in the Summer at Hampstead and made a conditional promise of going with them to their Seat at Cromer in Norfolk : Miss Hoare is very lively, frank, and Mistress of some pleasant—what shall I say ? —Accomplishments ? I do not know and have not time to explain. My older friends, earlier I should say, are Mr. Walmesley's family and Miss Long who is with them, but the sudden death of his daughter made our Meeting, of course, melancholy : She was a fine tho' not healthy Girl of about fourteen, appeared to have the Measles favourably, but the Eruption suddenly disappeared and she died almost instantaneously. I have to thank you for a former letter and I do so very heartily and for all you are so obliging as to write, be assured no Increase of my Fire-side, no Assembling of my Friends can in any degree seduce my mind from Miss Charter. I should have Contempt for my Ideas of Friendship if they could : No dear Lady have better Opinion of my Stability. Your Sister I trust is well : how I wish I could meet you ! Cannot it be so ordered ? You are seldom stationary and for your sake I am glad of it, but on my own Account, I could wish to know where I might find you, for tho' I am even now confined yet I have better chance for an Excursion than before

my Son was with me. He will not take my Sunday duty but objects not to any other: his Wife is a very pleasant woman of domestic habits: fond of her household occupations, loves reading but not voraciously and cares so little for Bath that we have to press her when we wish her to take some little part in that Scene of Idleness and Gaiety.

"So far I am fortunate and I do not at present discover any Drawbacks upon these good properties: if any, I should say, a kind of indifference for things which young people perhaps should not be indifferent to, but even this may be accounted for by her present Indisposition which I will not describe for it is nothing unusual. 'The Grey Mare the better Horse.' Yes I have heard some story, but I can scarcely relate it: is it not the wife recommending the grey mare and the husband the black horse to the person who was in search of domestic concord and equality and this was his Remark when he perceived by the Lady's greater pertinacity that he had failed with this Couple like all the preceding? Of course the Story has its Embellishments but these I leave to Story Tellers: perhaps you have another. By my Salisbury Friend, did you mean Miss Everett? there is one much nearer to me with her, but probably was not with her at that time. . . .

"Courage, for I have nearly finished, and yet there is another Impediment for I have written on the wrong Side of the paper—but I told you the Head was disordered and you now find how it is. My young people want me for their evening Reading, but I will not leave you till I am compelled to do it. Though I have not been very good, yet be you generous and show your Forgiveness by writing again very [soon.] . . .

"You ask my opinion of the Times. I cannot give a satisfactory one but I dread no Insurrections, no Hunts, no Cobbetts; and I hope cheerfully, and I have

comfort in the Benevolence and morality of the country in general."

In this letter we get the first definite mention of the Hoares, with whom Crabbe came to be on a very friendly footing, as the correspondence further shows from time to time. Of Richard Warner, the Bath clergyman who introduced him to the Hoares, we have seen something in an earlier chapter.

The closing paragraph shows that Crabbe took a sane view of the political situation at a time when the agitation for reform was rousing in the timid fears of what would happen as a result of the speeches and actions of Henry Hunt, William Cobbett, and other of the advanced Radicals of the time. Hunt was a Wiltshire man, though at this time he had shifted his centre of activities to London, and had been chairman the previous November of the Spa Fields meeting, when the military in attendance had orders, in the event of disturbance, to shoot at the speakers instead of at the crowd.

Again, it will be noticed, there has been a portion of the letter cut away—and again it looks from the preceding context, as though the lines removed concerned the writer's intimate feelings for another. Whether they were removed with the signature to satisfy the predatory demands of an autograph hunter or whether Miss Charter cut them away as indiscreet revelations, or from any feeling of jealousy, we cannot tell.

* * *

In March Elizabeth Charter was actually once more in Bath, staying at 19 Milsom Street, but even so the

anticipated meeting did not, it would appear, take place, but again the letter has been mutilated, and again there is something cryptic in some of the writer's remarks.

"My dear Miss Charter,—I found your letter at my house, but when delivered I do not know though I believe it was detained at the Office. I shall hear to-morrow.

"I am distressed by the thought of your journey. My son is going to his intended place of residence in the morning and will deliver this very hasty enquiry at Milsom Street though he cannot introduce himself.

"Do dear lady, if you remain at Bath or go to Clifton, write by the post and let me know your purpose. If you should be at Clifton I will be with you if possible and possibility there might be. I cannot bear your going unattended to Salisbury, yet if you be so purposed, what can I do? Tell me, my dear Miss Charter, can I make your journey more comfortable? I can be with you on Monday the 31st or Tuesday the 1st April, nay even the next day but I must be at Trowbridge on Thursday and Friday in the next week. If you really go on Friday in this week I know all this . . . but I am in some expectation . . . may succeed in their wishes to keep you with them.

"I wanted another half hour, so I should if I had been indulged with it. If you resolve to go on Friday and it be so determined, then write as soon as you can after your arrival at Wilbury but do not fail to let me know if your purpose be altered: Be assured that it would be most pleasant for me to accompany you and I would make it convenient if you either remain at Bath or go to Clifton.

"I believe I repeat the same thing for I am hurt at the idea of your going alone—forgive me and if you have time let me know your final resolution.

"If I had time, if it were not very very late and I

were not hurried, I would tell you the difference between *the interest before and now* but this subject must be reserved and perhaps it need not be brought forward. Do we not know it? At least I do. Write then dear Miss C. if you do not go. . . ."

There is to-day something a little diverting in the elderly clergyman's distress over the idea that a lady should travel alone, and his anxiety, on those grounds alone, to be allowed to establish himself as her escort.

* * *

In April Crabbe went to Salisbury, where he stayed with the Rev. William Douglas, who was Canon and Precentor of the Cathedral and Chancellor of the Diocese, and thence he arranged to drive the ten miles or so to Wilbury House, where Elizabeth Charter was staying with her aunt, Lady Malet.

"Dear Miss Charter,

"Your obliging note was delivered at Mr. Douglas's about an hour before my return from the house of Mr. Everett where I passed a great portion of the morning. I had called at the shop of Mr. Bennett, but the servant from Wilbury was not then arrived and now I am afraid will be returned but I will take the same walk again and these few more last words with me. If he be not yet departed he will deliver this assurance to my dear Miss Charter that I fully purpose myself the pleasure that I mentioned before and shall give some sober and cautious youth charge to drive me on Thursday the nearest and most direct way to Wilbury House.

"This is all that I have now to inform you of, but I thank you heartily for writing and though I am something disappointed by not seeing you at Salisbury yet

as you might have been here when I could not have had that satisfaction I will endeavour to think all is well, nay is best if that be possible. Everyone is kind to me here but I am not in my element. Here is everything that civility and hospitality can do, but kindness is become indispensable. I dine with a large party again today and large parties are better than small ones because they do not require so much attention and I may be one of them and yet retain (at least at times) my own meditations.

" Farewell Dear Lady, Believe me faithfully & truly yours GEO. CRABBE.

" With grateful remembrances to your friends. The Chancellor's pens and ink are even worse than those at Trowbridge, but you are skilled in deciphering."

* * *

" The best laid plans of mice and men gang aft agley," and Crabbe's next letter, written from Trowbridge on May 3, suggests that owing to the intervention of his Salisbury host the visit to Wilbury House was but of the briefest. It may be gathered from this letter (and subsequent ones) that he did little more than pay a call at Lady Malet's and was unable to remain and dine, owing to his " arbitrary friend," Canon Douglas, having made other arrangements—and so put himself in Miss Charter's bad books. Indeed, this letter is so ambiguous that it seems a little uncertain whether the poet did actually get to Wilbury House at all. The opening passages suggest that he did not, while later words indicate that he did.

" Your Letter my dearest Miss Charter has been to me both salutary and cordial. I really was distressed and even still think that Lady Malet had cause to be

offended. She obligingly invited me to her House and I eagerly accepted the Invitation ; nothing then should have held me from the Engagement, but as her Ladyship is so considerate, so sensible of my difficulties and so disposed to forgive, I certainly feel the less pain and can look forward to a future meeting with more Joy than Shame. I know what might be said to mortify my Vanity and that Lady Malet having felt no Disappointment in my Failture, may very easily be disposed to pardon my Want of Punctuality, but I will not have recourse to this Argument. The Man whom my dear Miss Charter is so good as to honour with her Friendship cannot be so perfectly insignificant to a relative so dear to her. But I will end the Subject and believing myself to be forgiven will look forward to Engagements without Entanglement, and Meetings without such immediate and compulsatory Parting.

" You flatter me my obliging Friend, by the pleasant vivacity of your Resentment and I am almost thankful to Mr. Douglas for procuring me such Proof of your Regard but, Alas! Dear, you would have been disappointed I fear had I stayed : I have not any superior qualifications for general Company and am a much better hearer than performer at a convivial party. My affections are in general too much engaged to allow of that Vacancy of mind which admits pleasantry and contributes largely to the Liveliness of after-dinner Conversation and this more particularly when I am with those who are so much interesting to me, for at other Times I do perhaps enter into the Frivolity of miscellaneous Discourse even too much, but to meet a Friend really dear to me and to know that I must very soon part, this takes away that spirit of Levity and inclination for Amusement that merely plays on the fancy and never touches the Heart. So it might be better, for your Friend might have been dull and heavy when you might have wished him to vindicate your

partiality by some little exertion of his Talents and understanding.

"Come now! be gentle with my arbitrary Friend; you may characterize him rightly but Mr. Douglas is a generous frank hearted man and he really paid me great attention, do for my sake my best Friend forgive and take him into favour. Upon my Word you must not raise my Vanity so high, unless you mean to depress it by some unforeseen Mortification: to speak of my 'being in the House and then expecting a second Disappointment from some unknown personage: some Jove in the clouds, to express yourself as consoled by my Wishes to have remained with you.' Dear Miss Charter! consider how soon the Wisest and Best of men are disposed to think highly of themselves and how much I who am not in that Number may be elevated and endangered by being supposed of such consequence.

"Yet you do mean it, and I must be pleased, tho' I will endeavour to correct the pride that mingles with the satisfaction. It is indeed very delightful to stand well with those whom we love and esteem and I wonder not that it sometimes is too seducing for man's weakness and Vanity. Of my esteem dear Miss Charter assure yourself: At first, however I felt myself disposed to look on you as a Lady whom I could wish to claim as a Friend, still if I had not in some degree succeeded, I should not have grieved nor felt any severe mortification: I should have said, there is something in me which this dear lady does not like and as I know so little of her, though what I do know is so agreeable, I must think no more of it: it must pass as the pleasant Dream of the Morning that the Business of Day dissipates and it returns no more; but it is far otherwise now; what Miss Charter calls her Weakness I call by a very Different Name, so far from diminishing it adds and that greatly to my regard: I find Sensibility where I was by no

means sure that I should find it, and the good Sense and superior Talents which I saw are accompanied by Qualities which I then could not see. No! my dear Miss Charter, you must never believe that what you have been pleased to communicate or what I have been enabled to trace have made any other Impression than that which a Friend desires should be made. I should not have expressed this, however I might feel it, had you not with so much Diffidence but so erroneously spoken of *sinking* in my Esteem. Sinking!—but I will add no more at least till I see you at Wilbury, if indeed you can stay and I can go.

"You say then, my dear Lady, that *All is over*. Well! I hope you have done right and yet how seldom can you find all you could desire. Age, Fortune, Understanding, Disposition, Connections! all correct! how very seldom, but I will believe you have acted judiciously and for your Happiness and if so, I rejoice at your Determination! but can you doubt the Truth of my Opinion respecting the Friendship contracted between a Man (whatever Period of Life he may be arrived at, excepting only extreme old age when it is not likely Friendships should commence) and a Lady unmarried. You say you know not why such friendship should be dissolved by the Lady's marrying! I might content myself by referring to experience: No Husband I think would admit of it, all would in some degree object, remember I only refer to those contracted within a certain Time: early and Childhood connections are out of the question. I repeat that in Friendships with a married lady, the Husband is a party: in a Letter received from Mrs. Norris today, Mr. Norris takes a considerable part of it: This is well; but could He believe that his Wife corresponded with a Man for whom he had no Regard and whom he knew it, [*sic*] I can easily conceive that without any jealousy he might think the Intimacy injudicious and so would your

Husband and therefore it is that I wished to know whether there was One who was likely to assume that Character ! I do not think this any Reason why Ladies should not contract Friendships, but I do think that as soon as *other Contracts* commence, that Friendship should be participated by the Husband or be given up. If I be in error pardon me. I speak against myself for how do I know how soon—But there is another thing you say that may sever this our Friendship, for so Dear Miss Charter you allow me to call it. No ! for in the first Place that Event is all but Impossibility and if it were possible the Case is not quite the same. Married ladies seldom care about the Tyes and Connections of their Husbands provided they are sure of their not interfering with their claims. With Men it is not so. Why ?—you see I have no Room to Reason upon. But dear Miss Charter; this is all superfluous. Whatever Freedom you have, it cannot be greater than mine : so there are not these Impediments to our Friendship—I write late and in haste but I am not afraid of unkind constructions—yet write again *soon* and say something to your Sister, kind it should be, tell me if she *wishes to see me :* I may honestly fear : but write and be very friendly to your

" G. Crabbe.

" In looking over what I have written I am afraid you will find me assuming too much even for a Friend. You must try and forgive and if you try and write also, I will bear a little reproof—be anything but silent, even severe."

" You say then, my dear Lady, that *all is over* "—in those words we seem to have a hint that Elizabeth Charter, if she had not been actually engaged to be married, had had a proposal which she had rejected. We have no clue to the identity of the man who with

CRABBE'S MULBERRY TREE

(In the garden of Trowbridge Rectory.)

" age, fortune, understanding, disposition, connections, all correct," failed to win Elizabeth Charter—somewhat to the poet's relief, if we be allowed to read between the lines of his letter.

* * *

When he addressed her again a month later (June 6) at Wilbury House, Miss Charter had gone to Taunton, whither his letter was redirected. Canon Douglas' delinquency is still a theme that affords the opportunity of exchanging compliments. In the interval Crabbe had paid a visit to London and arranged for another and longer stay there, had gone with Bowles to visit Samuel Rogers, and had there met Thomas Moore.

" My dear Miss Charter,—As your last Letter is dated the 15 of May, you will perceive that I am not so ungracious or rather say ungrateful as your Mind suggested that I might be when you wrote ' be not 2 months before you reply.' No ! you may make me vain for anything I know in my own Virtue to oppose you ; but ungrateful and unkind I may venture to say you will not make me. Well ! and how is my dear Friend ? and her Sister, with all the obliging Inhabitants of Wilbury House ? You speak of another Separation but I hope not an immediate one : Your hints from Somersetshire are not Laws and if they were, you are now preparing ; perhaps ready ; possibly gone, and then what becomes of my Visit and indeed of all we project and anticipate ? And are you both indeed going to be residents at that Taunton—Villa ? Would it were at Bath : I want to see your Sister again and to be near you always.

"I have just returned from a Town Visit and am going again ; partly on Business but principally to join a party of Friends and where will you be on my

Return ? ' not at Wilbury ? ' so I must Conclude and think no more at present of being there.

" *The Balance of Comfort*, I have not read : it is a good Title, and I will think of it as one mentioned by you. I should have loved very much to have passed two or three days with you and your Sister, but such things must not be they tell us. I hope there is no Harm in the Desire though, for if there be I am woefully guilty. Pray how do you like a Dinner-party at your own House when you care nothing for Men or Women and yet must treat them as Friends or at least as Intimates ? I am in that not-to-be-envied Predicament this Day. Strangers you can entertain as Strangers, civilly, Friends you can dine as Friends, cordially, but persons familiar and yet indifferent ! Cold at heart and free in manners, distant in all the Affections and intimate with all Impertinence, O ! dear ! dear ! Well ! tis but a Day ! and yet how important may a Day be, by and by.

" Again you bestow one whole page of your letter in Chastisement of poor Mr. Douglas ! I am aware how much I should have quarrelled with a Mistress Any-one who had done the same by me and taken you off when you had promised me your company, but feeling that my weakness Co-operated with Mr. Douglas' impetuosity, I became Party in the Offence and feel the Force of your Resentment, tho' directed to him. Flattering indeed is the Severity and much more [so] than my fair Declarations which drew from my dear Miss Charter those just but serious reflections on Flattery in general. Honest praise I would rather say and even then I agree that it should be used moderately and rather as you rightly suggest as a Cordial when the Spirit is faint, than an indulgence when there is no need of further Elevation.

" I had the pleasure when in Town to meet at the House of Mr. Rogers the Author of the Pleasures of Memory, whither I went with Mr. Bowles, Mr.

Moore (who has given us a new poem or rather four oriental Tales) and some very pleasant men were also with us. My head Quarters are with the family of Hoare the banker of Hampstead, where I domesticate: for liking the Lady of the House and being tollerably accomodating where I do like, it becomes a mutual benefit. I am not sure whether, all things remaining well, I shall not accept their invitation to his Seat in Norfolk in October, but I seldom look so far forward; at least to this World's Affairs.

"I am not *entirely* satisfied with your Determination. You do not assert that you will not marry and you well know how much must be given up in almost all cases, but there are reasons which I do not comprehend and I will not teize you though if we met, I believe I should [for] a little Time renew the Subject. . . .

"A young lady here to whom you sometimes allude and of whom I occasionally speak, has been indisposed, but I hope to see her today as some Compensation for the more horrifying part of the Meeting. You would not dislike each other: there is nothing prominent or striking in her Character but she is serious, observing, friendly and unaffected, is humoured but not humoursome and has a gentle and affectionate spirit. I was speaking of you yesterday and wishing you near us.—With respect to a certain event! It will fall out on the same Day when you give your hand to the youngest Son of Lady Malet, so remember.

"Do you know Miss Allott? did I mention her? not that it is of any Consequence, but at Dawlish I thought her agreeable. At Bath—but I have not Room for Variations of Sentiment, if they varied. . . .

"If I visit Salisbury, what alas, is that *now* to you? I had rather visit Taunton than be again so near and be disappointed. You enquire how Miss Long is? better as the summer advances, but far far from health. I hope to see her and her sister before my Return to

Town and now dear Miss Charter, let me beg an *early letter ;* kind and soothing me for my loss and yet I hope not to loose very very long. Remember me very kindly to your Sister whom indeed I felt disposed to love and respectfully to Lady Malet. Yours dear Miss C. most truly,

"GEO. CRABBE."

The "young lady here" may be taken to be Miss Waldron, and the "certain event" to refer to renewed gossip as to Crabbe's possible remarriage. His disclaimer is evidently meant to say that such an event, with Miss Waldron as bride, was of the unlikeliest, for "the youngest son of Lady Malet" had at the time not completed his third year!

* * *

Some time during the latter part of May Crabbe had been in London, and the previous letter showed him contemplating a return there to complete his visit to the Hoares, and to fulfil some social engagements. On June 19 he reached town, having travelled thither with his Trowbridge friend Waldron, and on the very next day wrote to Elizabeth Charter in reply to a letter which he had received a few days before setting out and one in which she had, it seems, rated him for his repeated failure to appear at Wilbury. He was evidently hurt at the tone which she had taken and is now pleased, now sad, in discussing it.

"Who my dear Miss Charter beholding that dear little Dove with its olive-branch, or what is better than such Emblem, a Letter, in its Bill, would have looked for so much Displeasure and Animosity beneath it? I, simple Creature as I am, expected all that was kind

(and if indeed there was some cause for offence) after a little Demonstration of offended Friendship, the most generous and unhesitating Forgiveness and lo ! instead of this you have been so severe that I know not how to reply : Am I really so ungrateful ? so unmindful of your Condescendsion ? of your Friendship ? of our meeting at Bath and all the pleasant Things—pleasant to *me* at least—which I had treasured up in my Memory and not there only. Nay ! but you cannot believe it : how ! that I meant nothing by an Engagement to be at Wilbury during your stay ? Can you indeed think me so very despicable a breaker of my word ? and that too in a promise by which I honoured myself.

" I have a good Mind to say that had I fifty Reasons for not paying that Visit and all strong and valid, I would not give you one : Naughty as you are : It is well that I love you as I do, or I think I could not forgive you, nor is that all your Severity : All you write of Mr. Douglas and in fact all the first part of your Letter is so severe that I would if possible have fancied that some angry Being had borrowed your Pen and Name ; and yet afterwards, as we are all willing to soothe and flatter ourselves, I began to try how I could draw comfort even from your Severity and I said in the Pride of my Heart ; if this dear Lady be really in Earnest let me, while I feel the Displeasure, feel likewise the Gratification and the comfortable Assurance that it is not to persons indifferent such Language is used. See ! how desirous I am of indulging this Idea that I give it Encouragement even from Resentment : But now do not repeat it, pray do not, for tho' you flatter my affection you hurt my Spirits which are not at all Times the Strongest.

" Be assured that I would have been at Wilbury House during your Visit, after Lady Malet's Return had it been possible and with Respect to that great and all prevailing Man, as my dear Miss Charter appears to think him, do ! make the Experiment. Do you call me

to Taunton and let him command me to Salisbury and see whither my obedience and inclination will lead me ? —Only tell me, that I am expected and let me to know that I may have a few Days before me and then you shall see how causeless some of your Cruelty is ; but I believe Mr.—what is his Name ? has raised the severe spirit in you ; for you are a little bitter in your observation respecting that poor Man's Distress : I will not indeed judge of a Man's Grief, whose Mind and Manners are strange to me, but I am not ignorant what a Disappointment is where the Heart is engaged, though it does not absolutely give Rise to Consumption and I can pity a Man so rejected, more than some people appear to do, but you have been teized you say : Well Dear I will not judge unkindly for I do not love to quarrel with you, especially since the two last of our Meetings and to be quite in earnest, I should think myself most fortunate, if I had Cause to believe your Regard for me, was as much strengthened by those Meetings as I am very certain is the Case with me and mine. Now be very sincere respecting Taunton : I can readily enter into your situation and know the Kind of Respect due to two Ladies at Norton Cottage but I may presume may I not, that if I were a Day or two or even three at Taunton, I might go over and enquire how the Ladies were, without any Question from other persons or any doubt of the Ladies themselves ?—Of this I am most assured that in that and all other places it will be to me a first pleasure to meet you, and now do be very good and write to me *immediately*, because indeed, indeed I am not quite comfortable since your last and if it were not for the Whisperings of that Vanity, I should not be in tollerable Humour with myself, from the idea of lying under your Displeasure.

"This Subject has so engrossed me that I have little to spare for any other. I came to Town partly to fulfil an engagement with Lord Holland, partly

to complete one before interrupted with Mrs. Hoare and very little of the Business you allude to has influenced my Journey. I think of remaining all the next week and part of the following and probably shall not be at Trowbridge before Saturday the 5th of July and will you not write so that your letter may arrive *before* I go ? before many Days be past ? as soon as you can find Time from Bride-Visiting and Attendance upon Friends present ? Let me anticipate so much Good. I am fatigued with my Night-travelling tho' I have taken some sleep but I could not any longer defer my Complaints nor my Petition. You either do not know of what Value you are to me, or you know it and have no Mercy notwithstanding. How is your Sister ? I daresay, if the Truth were known, She would make the kinder Friend of the Two and if she knew what you wrote she would expostulate with you on your Harshness.

" Miss Waldron had left Trowbridge some Days, so that I had Nobody to console me under your Tyranny: My Daughter is too much indisposed. Mrs. and Miss Hoare are very good, but they do not know you and even if Dissipation and Idleness were Remedies, I am not much disposed to have Recourse to them. Remember me very kindly to your Sister and say to Lady Malet, when you write, that it was not possible for me to be at Wilbury in that Interval between her Ladyship's Arrival and your Departure : tis a sad thing if I cannot obtain a little Credit. Do dear Miss Charter ! take my part ! and side with me against this Sister of yours. Heaven bless you : I cannot leave you unaffectionately but do not be severe when you write again, and be assured that I am truly and obediently yours

" George Crabbe.

" Respecting your Ideas on a certain Subject, into which I cannot now enter, I cannot entirely accord with you. At any rate it would be wrong to make Vows and

Promises because a state of Celibacy is not a Duty in these Times, in the Early State of the Christian Community it might be prudent but no more then.

" Direct, if you please, (that is I mean if you will be good and write to me) Mr. Hatchard's, Bookseller, Piccadilly, London."

It evidently hurt him that his dear Miss Charter should reproach him, but it is difficult to say whether he had any real warm feeling for her or whether his letters are not the expression of " that old-fashioned gallantry and politeness " which was remarked as his unfailing characteristic when in the company of ladies.

* * *

His letters are so much concerned with his thoughts and feelings in relation to the special correspondent whom he is addressing that with the best of opportunities he did not indulge in those gossips on paper about people met and things said which have the most lasting value. In the diary or journal which he kept during many years he jotted down little more than bare names and brief notes which suffice to indicate something of the life which he led as a literary " lion " in London, but lack every other attraction. Here is a week of the journal kept during this visit to London, and the bald entries make us wish that Crabbe had at times made external matters the subject of his letters, had given his views on the men and their talks at Rogers' famous breakfast parties, and the other notable houses at which he was welcomed during a gratifying month of being lionised.

" June 26th.—Mr. Rogers and the usual company at breakfast. Lady Holland comes and takes me to

Holland House. The old building. Addison's room. Bacon. Mr. Fox. The busts and statues. Gardens very pleasant and walks extensive. Meet at Holland House Mr. Allen. He appears equally intelligent and affable. Must have a difficult part, and executes it well. A young Grecian under Lady Holland's protection. Meet Mr. Campbell. Mr. Moore with us. Mr. Rogers joins us in the course of the day. Met Mr. Douglas, in my way, at the Horse Guards, and promised to dine with him on Saturday. He says I cannot leave Holland House; that it is *experimentum crucis*. Dinner. Mr. Brougham, who in some degree reminds me of Mr. Burke. Ready at all subjects, and willing: very friendly. Duchess of Bedford, daughter of the Duchess of Gordon. The confidence of high fashion. In the evening, Countess Besborough, a frank and affectionate character, mother of Lady Caroline Lamb, invites me to her house the next evening.—Miss Fox. I remember meeting her thirty years since; but did not tell her so, and yet could not help appearing to know her; and she questions me much on the subject. Parry it pretty well.—Mrs. Fox. All the remains of a fine person; affectionate manners and informed mind. Diffident and retiring. Appeared to be much affected at meeting a friend of her husband. Invites me to her house; and I am told she is much in earnest. Retire very late.

"27th.—Breakfast with Mr. Brougham and Lady Holland. Lord Holland to speak at Kemble's retiring, at the meeting at Freemasons' Tavern to-morrow. Difficulty of procuring me an admission ticket, as all are distributed. Trial made by somebody, I know not who, failed. This represented to Lady Holland, who makes no reply. Morning interview with Mr. Brougham. Mr. Campbell's letter. He invites us to Sydenham. I refer it to Mr. Rogers and Mr. Moore. Return to town. The porter delivers me a paper containing the admission ticket, procured by Lady Holland's means: whether

request or command I know not. Call on Mr. Rogers. We go to the Freemasons' Tavern. The room filled. We find a place about half way down the common seats, but not where the managers dine, above the steps. By us Mr. Smith, one of the authors of the Rejected Addresses. Known, but no introduction. Mr. Perry, editor of the Morning Chronicle, and Mr. Campbell, find us, and we are invited into the Committee-room. Kemble, Perry, Lord Erskine, Mr. Moore, Lord Holland, Lord Ossory, whom I saw at Holland House. Dinner announced. Music. Lord Erskine sits between me and a young man, whom I find to be a son of Boswell. Lord Holland's speech after dinner. The Ode recited. Campbell's speech. Kemble's.—Talma's. We leave the company, and go to Vauxhall to meet Miss Rogers and her party. Stay late.

"28th.—Go to St. James's Place. Lord Byron's new works, Manfred, and Tasso's Lament. The tragedy very fine—but very obscure in places. The Lament more perspicuous, and more feeble. Seek lodgings, 37, Bury Street. Females only visible. Dine as agreed with Mr. Douglas. Chiefly strangers. My new lodgings a little mysterious.

"29th.—Breakfast at the Coffee-house in Pall Mall, and go to Mr. Rogers and family. Agree to dine, and then join their party after dinner. Mr. Stothard. Foscolo. Drive to Kensington Gardens in their carriage. Grosvenor Gate. Effect new and striking. Kensington Gardens have a very peculiar effect; not exhilarating, I think, yet alive and pleasant. Return to my new lodgings. Enquire for the master. There is one, I understand, in the country. Am at a loss whether my damsel is extremely simple, or too knowing.

"30th. Letter from Mrs. Norris. Like herself. First hour at Mr. Murray's. A much younger and more lively man that I had imagined.—A handsome drawing-room above, where his friends go when they please,

usually from two to five o'clock. Books of all, but especially of expensive, kinds. There new works are heard of, and there generally first seen. Pictures, by Phillips, of Lord Byron, Mr. Scott, Campbell, Moore, Rogers (yet unfinished). Mr. Murray wishes me to sit. Advise with Mr. Rogers. He recommends. Dine with Lord Ossory. Meet Marquis and Marchioness of Lansdowne. Engage to dine on Friday. Lord Gower.

"July 1st.—I foresee a long train of engagements. Dine with Mr. Rogers. Company: Kemble, Lord Erskine, Lord Ossory, Sir George Beaumont, Mr. Campbell, and Mr. Moore. Miss R. retires early, and is not seen any more at home. Meet her, at the Gallery in Pall Mall, with Mr. Westall.

"2d.—Duke of Rutland. List of pictures burned at Belvoir Castle. Dine at Sydenham, with Mr. and Mrs. Campbell, Mr. Moore, and Mr. Rogers. Poets' Club."

Thomas Campbell regarded Crabbe, for whom he had, he said, "a filial upward-looking affection," as "absolutely delightful," and Moore many years later recalled this occasion when writing his tender verses of acknowledgment of the gift of Crabbe's inkstand:

"Bright was our board that day—though *one*
Unworthy brother there had place;
As 'mong the horses of the Sun,
One was, they say, of earthly race.

"Yet, *next* to Genius is the power
Of feeling where true genius lies;
And there was light around that hour
Such as, in memory, never dies."

The Poets' Club which the four poets dining together planned—with, it is recorded, Crabbe as president—apparently got no further than that one delightful gathering.

On July 15 Crabbe entered in his journal: "Was too late this morning, Messrs. Rogers and Moore were gone. Go to church at St. James's. The sermon good: but the preacher thought proper to apologise for a severity he had not used. Write some lines in the solitude of Somerset House, not fifty yards from the Thames on one side, and the Strand on the other; but as quiet as the sands of Arabia. I am not quite in good humour with this day; but, happily, I cannot say why." In quoting the closing words Canon Ainger says: "The last mysterious sentence is one of many scattered through the diary, which, aided by dashes and omission marks by the editorial son, point to certain sentimentalisms in which Crabbe was still indulging, even in the vortex of fashionable gaieties." It is quite likely that the "mysterious sentence" had nothing to do with sentimental affairs, but was a more or less natural consequence of arriving too late for an evident appointment with Rogers and Moore.

A week later he dined with George Canning at Gloucester Lodge, near Brompton, and the entry in his journal for that day may be quoted as a further example of the way in which he could give at once but bare jottings of external matters and touching revelations of mental ones.

"21st.—I would not appear to myself superstitious. I returned late last night, and my reflections were as cheerful as such company could make them, and not, I am afraid, of the most humiliating kind; yet, for the first time these many nights, I was incommoded by dreams, such as would cure vanity for a time in any mind where they could gain admission. Some of Baxter's mortifying spirits whispered very singular

combinations. None, indeed, that actually did happen in the very worst of times, but still with a formidable resemblance. It is doubtless very proper to have the mind thus brought to a sense of its real and possible alliances, and the evils it has encountered, or might have had; but why these images should be given at a time when the thoughts, the waking thoughts, were of so opposite a nature, I cannot account. So it was. Awake, I had been with the high, the apparently happy: we were very pleasantly engaged, and my last thoughts were cheerful. Asleep, all was misery and degradation, not my own only, but of those who had been.—That horrible image of servility and baseness—that mercenary and commercial manner! It is the work of imagination, I suppose; but it is very strange. I must leave it.—Walk to Holborn. Call and pay for yesterday's coffee, which, with a twenty-pound note and some gold, I could not discharge then. A letter from Mrs. Norris; like herself and all hers. Now for business. Called at Holborn, and stayed an hour with P——, York Coffee-house.[1] Return and write. Go to Oxford Street to take a place for Wycombe, a mile and a half from Mrs. Norris. After a short delay, I pay my visit to Mrs. Spencer. Her husband's note left with me. Find her and the young people. Return by Mr. Murray's, and send to Lady Errol from his house. He obligingly sent his servant to Bury Street. Lady Errol much better. May hope to meet Mr. Frere this day at dinner. Prepare to go with Mr. Douglas to Mr. Canning's.—Mr. Canning's

[1] The York Coffee House was in St. James's Street. It is thus described in the "Epicure's Almanack": "We now cross Picadilly, and enter St. James's Street, where we find on the left-hand side, No. 46, the York Coffee House, kept by Mr. Parker; here dinners are drest to order, and soups served at all hours, and the charges moderate. Opposite this, stands a subscription-house, where the subaltern officers of the guards, and other hopeful shoots of fashion, wage perpetual war against time, either by the sly tactics of the Roman lounger, Fabius Cunctator, or *selon* the more dashing manœuvres of the modern Attila—by *killing* the enemies *off*—with billiard balls."

dinner. Gardens and house in very beautiful style: doubly secluded, and yet very near town. Mr. Huskisson, two younger gentlemen, Mr. Frere, Mr. Canning, Mr. Douglas, and myself. Claret more particularly excellent. Ministerial claret. A lively day. Shakespeare. Eton and Westminster. Mr. Canning.—This is the last evening in town, notwithstanding the very kind invitation of Mr. Douglas. And here I may close my journal, of certainly the most active, and, with very little exception,—that is, the exception of one or two persons,—the most agreeable of all excursions—except ——."

The passage about dreaming and waking was described by Thomas Moore as curiously similar to the journalising style of Lord Byron. The experience which inspired that passage must surely have also inspired the remarkable poem "The World of Dreams," published posthumously and given as of an unknown date of composition.

It was probably during this visit to London that Crabbe received the following cordially insistent invitation to a tête-à-tête with Lady Caroline Lamb, the eccentric wife of the statesman afterwards known to fame as Lord Melbourne:

"If it should quite suit you will you drink tea alone with me *to-night*, or *to-morrow* at 9—or Monday—only let me know. Ever most sincerely yours, Caroline Lamb."

Whether Crabbe accepted we cannot say—he merely endorsed the note—in cipher—"answerd."

* * *

It was indeed a crowded time, and "the long train of engagements" which the poet foresaw was duly experienced. Day after day he was breakfasted, or, as we should say, lunched, dined, and taken about by

some of the most notable people of the time. Yet he generally managed to achieve his self-imposed task of writing thirty lines of verse a day. On July 14 he wrote: "A welcome letter from ——. This makes the day more cheerful. Suppose it were so. Well! 'tis not!" It is not extravagant to think that the blank should be filled by the name of Miss Charter, that the welcome letter was the delayed one referred to in the following, which he wrote from Trowbridge on August 7 shortly after his return. It is to be regretted that he did not think his correspondent likely to be interested in particulars of his meetings and converse in the literary and social world of London and of his visitings in the neighbourhood.

On July 12—after returning from a visit to the Hon. William Spencer[1] at Petersham—the poet addressed the following hitherto unpublished lines to Mrs. Spencer (whom he mentions in his journal as one of his "favourite characters"):

"That new-made Honour doth forget Men's Names
Engrossed and happy in itself—is true,
But still my Want of Memory Pardon claims,
For mine is Honour great as well as new,
Honour to know, and to be known by, you;
Wonder not then that I should cast away,
The common Stores that in the Memory grew;
That GEORGE appearing I should RICHARD say
Or tell the Moon's pale Light, 'Lo! thine the glorious Day.'

"But her best Treasures Memory still retains.
'The Power of Beauty I remember yet';

[1] William Robert Spencer (1769–1834), poet and wit, educated at Harrow and Christ Church, Oxford, mixed freely in the Society of Sheridan, Fox, Sydney Smith, Horner—and we may add Crabbe. He died in poverty and obscurity in Paris.

Thy Smile for ever in the Soul remains,
And though the Sun upon that Joy hath set,
Remembrance lives—it is my Pride, we met :—
O ! could I give that Day its proper Fame,
Not distant Ages should those Hours forget ;
When I thy Friend—Allow the Word—became ;
And Honours new or old shall not efface that Name."

" On the last Day of June my dear Miss Charter favoured me with a Letter which I received in Town, though not so soon as I ought, Mr. Hatchard [1] being at Brighton and his Letters of all description, waiting his return and mine with them, but still I have been a Month in possession of your Forgiveness and all the Sentiments of that Letter, some pleasant, some—what shall I say ?—not painful certainly because I think they were not intended to be so and yet producing that Effect in some Degree.

" During the whole length of my Excursion I found myself perpetually under engagement : three Times only in the 40 Days I dined by myself and even then the Dinner not the Day was my own : the rest were given to old Friends and new Acquaintances, to Business chiefly such as Writers and publishers of Books only are conversant with, and to Visits and Conversations, some very pleasant and some whimsical and out of the Way and which no place but London in its mixed Society and Facility of Intercourse can afford.

[1] John Hatchard opened shop at 173 Piccadilly, immediately east of St. James's Hall in 1797 at the age of 29. In June, 1801, he moved to 190 and later to 187. In February, 1817, Hatchard had undergone a trial for libel in the Court of King's Bench. Crabbe had opened up correspondence with Hatchard in 1799 and in 1807 he published a volume of Crabbe's poems with immense success. The Horticultural Society and a Matrimonial Agency both originated at 190 Piccadilly, where Hatchard still was in 1817–18. John Hatchard died in 1847. The shop-front at 187 Piccadilly has recently been restored to its early 19th-century form and appearance. A great deal of information concerning Crabbe and his connection with the House of Hatchard will be found in Mr. A. L. Humphrey's admirable little volume " Piccadilly Bookmen," Hatchard's, Piccadilly, 1893.

" Yet all was not as I wished : like other Pleasures mine were accompanied by Disappointments. A peevish and now regretted Misunderstanding took place between me and my Friends at Hampstead : I am afraid I was captious because they were rich, and being the greater People in the World's Estimation, I was, perhaps, unnecessarily proud. They did not forgive an apparent Neglect which I could not prevent and for which I made every possible Apology and fatigued myself, even to Illness, in seeking to prevent their Expectation and Inconvenience, but I did not afterwards go over to them as I now think I ought to have done, depending upon their yielding and sending to me. How it will terminate I know not, but these little interruptions of Friendship are very painful ; yet Mrs. Hoare is in such Situation, and so knew of mine that I think she should have done something towards Meeting, —but I will judge only myself.

" And you dear Lady I scarcely know whether you have not a charge against me of as great, nay greater Magnitude : Had I obeyed the dictates of my Heart and indulged my first wish I had, notwithstanding the Sentence you so deliberately pronounced, taken my place in an Exeter Mail and let the Argument respecting the propriety of the Visit been carried on personally, but while I thought on this I felt drawn into the Vortex of a London Society and yielded Day after Day to the Calls of—No ! I cannot inform you of whom nor how many, but I might enumerate all the people in my own way, but in a Class so far above me that I must not in Christian Humility give you their Names and Titles ; still you will perhaps do me the Justice to believe that I would most cheerfully have left all, could it have been done with propriety or Gratitude, to have had one Walk and one Morning or Evening Conversation with my Friend at Norman [i.e. Norton] Cottage.

" But what is this dear Miss Charter that you urge of

Impropriety ? if a Clergyman who has had Grandchildren these ten years (or might have had if he has not) if he cannot have the pleasure of waiting upon a Lady who honours him with her regard and professes some Esteem for his—even imaginary—Good Qualities, if this cannot be done, the World is not only fastidious and over delicate, but mad and ridiculous ! Still you will say, there is no contending against its Opinions ? True but let us first be convinced that they really are the Opinions of any respectable part of the Community, before we subject ourselves to ye Inconvenience and Hardship of their Interdiction. You observe that if *Business* called me : and how my dear Lady is this World to know what is Business, much less what kind of Business people have ? Surely there is a little Unnecessary fear of Impropriety, but of this I who feeling no fear am not the proper judge—must not decide—If that were all, I should think ill of my Talents, slow as they are in all the Transactions of busy life, if Business of some kind could not be found, invented or created ; but if when this be done you are indeed to use your own Words ' inaccessible at Norton ' of what use would be either the Pretence of Business or the Reality ?

" But now I am speaking of Business will you permit me to give you some Account of mine ? I found in London sufficient Encouragement for me to go on with my Book and I talked of Christmas as a probable Season when I might have it ready. Inadvertently indeed I so judged, for on a supposition which I made that it was of the former size and would contain about ten thousand Lines, I find independently of all Criticism and Emendation and all Change of purpose and Deliberation between Story and Story, that to finish my Copy in Time, I must transcribe an hundred Verses daily and this when I consider the Interruptions and especially in this busy Time of Confirmation, etc., I am almost frightened by my Temerity and feel sensible of the

A Trowbridge Street in 1814

(From a water-colour in the possession of Mrs. Mackay, the Grange, Trowbridge.)

hastiness of my promise. My Sons too, once my Helpers as Judges and Critics, now married and One gone from me: indeed, indeed my Friends and particularly my nearest Friends must be all good and indulgent and must not be displeased with me (as I doubt my Friend at Hampstead, with her Husband and Daughter now are) but all must be Health and Harmony, and even then I shall find my Task equal to my Ability of both Kinds, that which relates to the Employment of the Mind and that whose chief demand is on the Fingers of the right Hand: tho' my Head is but too much disposed to feel fatigue even at the easy task of copying the Verses already prepared.

"Now no more of Poetry: I had enough in Town, where I daily met all our principal Rhymers except Lord Biron [*sic*] who is not in England and the Poets of the Lakes who form a Society by themselves, and at once exclude and are excluded by our pride and theirs.

"I read your Relation of the Tempest with some shuddering. What you write of your Sister, except so far as it relates to my supposed preference, I can read and subscribe to with pleasure for it well accords with all I saw: alas! that was very little. Will you—but it must be at your pleasure—mention me to Lady Malet as one Grateful for her obliging Attentions? I cannot at the end of a Letter attempt to reply to what you observe of *Men* and *their Feelings* but I may say, that there is a great deal of Unpleasantness which arises from Misapprehension and want of due Confidence and Knowledge and Trust in each other. Do you know that I sought Information respecting Teachers of young gentlemen and obtained some, but none I fear of any use as I could hear of only Schools taking a greater or less number and the Sums I thought disproportionate to the apparent Reputation of the School, but I hope your Friend has found one suitable.

"I wish I knew Mr. x x—but of what use unless I

knew you. Now do not be displeased. Let the Dove come Dovelike and believe me truly and affectionately yours

" G. CRABBE.

" Does not Miss Charter think that we have known each other a sufficient Time, to have the Red-mark put upon my Letters without offending ? without Impropriety ? Be generous, can you not ? "

It is curious that Crabbe should say so little of his experiences in London, but his biographer has placed it on record that even in home talk " he rarely spoke—even to his sons, of the brilliant circles in which he had been figuring." Though London with its kaleidoscopic changes of associates fascinated him—" I love London, and who does not, if not confined to it "—he returned home always without any change in his manners or habits.

The reiterated reference to the " Red-mark " presumably indicates the writer's desire to be permitted to prepay the postage of his letters. It is not easy to recognise how there could be anything improper in such prepayment.

* * *

" This busy time of Confirmation " of which Crabbe spoke in the preceding letter was a reference to the approaching visitation of the Bishop of Sarum[1] to Devizes on August 15, and it was a particularly busy time for the poet, as it devolved upon him to preach the appropriate sermon. The local papers dealt with the

[1] Dr. John Fisher [1748–1825]. Dr. Fisher had been tutor to the Duke of Kent (1780–85) and to his niece the Princess Charlotte (1805). He was translated from Exeter to Salisbury in 1807. He is often mentioned in Fanny Burney's journals and letters.

event in a "pompous account" and gave a brief summary of the sermon.

In the "Bath Chronicle" of August 21, 1817, and the "Bath Herald" of two days later appeared substantially the same report of the confirmation, and of Crabbe's sermon on the occasion:

"On Friday last the Lord Bishop of Sarum held his triennial visitation and confirmation, for the Deanery of Potteral, at Devizes. The day was one of honourable exultation to every sincere friend of the Established Church; who, in times like the present, could not but rejoice in the 'decency and order,' and solemnity, with which 'all things were done,' in the confirmation of so many young people—1,370—in their baptismal vow, and in the faith of their fathers; and in the large crowd that filled the venerable church, attended the ceremony, and remained to join in the impressive service of our beautiful Liturgy, and to hear the Sermon and the Charge.—The former was preached by the Rev. and justly celebrated Geo. Crabbe, rector of Trowbridge, on 1 Cor. x. 6.; and as a prose composition subtracted nothing from the fame which he has acquired as an original English bard. Commencing with a slight but masterly analysis of the nature of man, as a creature prone to oscillate in his opinions, and to push them to extremes; it exemplified the truth of this representation in a rapid, but luminous sketch of the events of ecclesiastical history, from the promulgation of the Gospel to the present moment; and inferred the necessity of preventing that prevailing tendency to religious sentiment, which is, happily, so remarkable in these days, from vibrating into the wildness of fanaticism, or the darkness of superstition.

"The Charge was of the best school of eloquence; elegant, but forcible; chastely classical but deeply impressive, and highly appropriate to the solemnity

of its subject-matter. Pregnant with good sense, and correct views of the present state of the Established Church, and of the dangers both from within and from without to which it is exposed; and delivered with solemnity, dignity, and grace; it had its full effect; and left no doubt on the minds of the numerous Clergy who listened to it, of the imperative duty imposed on them, of contending (by a well tempered and well directed zeal) for the honourable interests of our own Zion; for the pure faith once delivered to the saints; and for the maintenance of the sound and scriptural principles of the Established Church, in opposition to the open attacks of those without the pale, and the undermining influence of that fanatico-puritanico-calvanistic spirit which has unhappily, of late years, infected, perverted, and darkened, many of the watchmen within the citadel. An earnest exhortation to the Clergy, to establish, encourage, and support gratuitous schools for the children of the poor, on the National Plan of Education, as the best means of ensuring to them right views of faith, and just motives of conduct, formed the judicious conclusion of this emphatic and interesting charge.

"The general claim of the Established Priesthood to the character of intellectual excellence and varied attainment, was well supported, in the large proportion of men eminent for talent, erudition, and professional knowledge, assembled on the occasion; among whom it was somewhat remarkable that we should observe three gentlemen universally ranked in the first class of modern English poets,—Bowles, unrivalled for delicacy of feeling, tenderness of sentiment, and harmony of versification—Crabbe, (in the language of a brother bard)

'Of nature
The sterner poet, and the best.'

And Crowe, whose gem of Lewesdown Hill, sparkling with the fire of Milton, and the 'purest ray of Shake-

speare's genius,' while it extorts the unequalled praise of every reader of taste, awakes his regret, that the lofty bard has not given more of the jewels of his fancy to an admiring public.

"We are pleased to understand, that at the special request of the Bishop, universally seconded by the Clergy present, the Sermon of the Preacher for the day is speedily to be published.

"We cannot conclude without stating a circumstance, which is well calculated, in these days of obloquy and gainsaying, to give heartfelt satisfaction to the friends of the Establishment, that the youthful candidates for confirmation, on the present occasion, throughout the diocese, exceed in number those of any former period; at Warminster, there were 300 more than ever known."

The reporter did not anticipate the advice "verify your quotations," or he would have known that Byron, referring to Crabbe in his satire, spoke thus:

> "This fact in Virtue's name let Crabbe attest;
> Though nature's sternest painter, yet the best."

* * *

Of William Lisle Bowles we have seen something earlier, he is remembered as an "influence" if his poetry is no longer read by any but the studious. Crowe, of whom the reporter speaks so enthusiastically, is probably to-day almost unknown. He was William Crowe, for over forty years Rector of Alton Barnes, in Wiltshire, and author of a poem entitled "Lewesdon Hill," inspired by one of the lovely heights of West Dorsetshire, near Stoke Abbas, of which the author was for a few years rector before he exchanged in 1787 to the Wiltshire living, in which he spent the rest of his

life. A year after leaving Stoke Abbas he published his poem, which was much praised by competent contemporary critics and passed through several editions. "How little is Crowe known, even to persons who are fond of poetry! Yet his 'Lewesdon Hill' is full of noble poetry." So said Samuel Rogers, who, when he was travelling in Italy and pondering his poem on that lovely land, kept Milton and Crowe as companion influences in forming his blank verse. Crowe was long Orator to the University of Oxford, and was wont to walk from Alton Barnes to Oxford when his duties called him thither.

* * *

The Visitation was over when Crabbe wrote again to Elizabeth Charter on August 20.

"My dear Miss Charter,—That your Letter affects me is most certain, nor is the Sensation entirely, though assuredly for the greater part, pleasant: the truth is that I am ashamed of what appears a tardy and therefore ungrateful Reply to the Letters of a Friend so obliging and so highly valued; it is not easy for me to give the Reasons for my delaying what is always a pleasure, but the general reason is because it *is* a pleasure and is deferred to some quiet and appropriate Time, when I do not apprehend any of the every-day Claims upon my Attention; Still if you my dear Friend are partial enough to me to take any Satisfaction in my Letters, I must be at once ungrateful and Self-denying —two things seldom coming together—if I delayed writing from any Cause except entire Inability which I cannot at this Time plead; on the Contrary I have copied 300 Lines this day and yet not been unmindful of your friendly Admonition, but Copying even with correction is not that Trying work which Composition

sometimes proves to be; you are very good to think of my Task and how much I have to do in a given Time, but you will consider my dear Lady that it was voluntarily imposed on myself from a fear of habitual Procrastination and knowing how soon we contract and love the Habits which till they actually become such are dreaded and postponed and this may be said of more important Things than writing Verses.

"My Engagements though many when I was in Town were not such Confinement as you imagine, indeed I had more Time there than in this *quiet* Parsonage, for there I had a certain portion of the Day to myself which here I cannot insure: There was no Miss Carr, nor do I know where she now talks; my List of Friends or Acquaintance new and old is not extensive, I will not however trouble you with it now: it will be better given when we meet for I hope that Time will come at some Place, and I do not much Regard where it is, if I prefer Bath it is because that promises more time; what say you dear Miss Charter to a *Sea-port* or some Village on the Coast? I found Dawlish very pleasant and I am sure, almost sure, you would like the Walk which is left by the falling Tide below the Rocks; but I will engage to find beauties in any part of the Country which you may choose. I could take my few Papers with me and by early rising leave myself ample Time, when my Task is done for what will repay me so well for my Dilligence: Come Dear What say you? be not very unwilling—a double Call in this *quiet* Place! I must say Adieu for the Evening.

"*Friday* 22*nd.*

"I know not what you will think of my Proposal, the Visit to—but I hope you will pardon it. I am pleased to find you have a Friend so near to you, and whatever some Men may think, I really have a good Opinion of female Friendships: they appear to me, more pure and disinterested than Men's, which are seldom found with-

out Interest or the grosser Pleasures for their Basis : I am afraid you have thought me negligent respecting that Lady and her Son, but indeed I made several enquiries, at Bath and Salisbury, etc. not however hearing of such School as I thought you meant, I would not trouble you with the Result of my Research nor would I now had not the fear of appearing forgetful urged me. You did not mention the annual Sum to which your Friend thought of going and that made me Cautious, in speaking of those Places of which I did hear, for there is something one cannot well bear in giving a great pompous Account of expensive Situations to those who mean not to try them, but in all this I may be in Error ; it appears that no School of any kind is yet wanted and probably by the time it is, sufficient Information may be obtained.

"I am very grateful when you assure me that the Doors at Norton will not be barred against me, nor the Hearts there hardened for that I should feel very unpleasantly : Mrs. Hoare and I shall, I daresay reunite again and I might be wrong, but these wealthy People are apt to gain an Ascendancy almost without knowing it. I mean to write by and by but not to go to their Norfolk House on the Coast. In fact I must be busy wherever I am. If you see in the Bath paper a pompous Account of the Confirmation at Devizes and my Preaching, be so kind as to give me Credit for some Modesty and do not suppose I knew anything of it for indeed I did not. I will contrive and frank the Sermon to you when it is published for you may trust me when I tell you it is not worth the postage. My Verses, if it please Heaven that I remain in health, will be ready about Christmas. Do, if you can conveniently, go to Wilbury for you will then appear to be something nearer, nay actually will be so and that is placing more in One's Way if the Time and Twenty Things of more or less Importance will permit.

"My Sons and their Wives are yet with me, One Son and one Wife permanently and that will occasionally permit me to take excursions at least of the shorter Kind. Do you know that my people here have swindled me and I cannot help laughing a little at their Ingenuity. The Custom was in this place to have a morning Duty complete and Afternoon Sermon once in two weeks because on the alternate Sunday, the Minister was called to his Duty at a neighbouring Chapel: Some years since the Trowbridge people said, we will give the Minister 20 or 25£ if he will let us have the 2 Sermons each Sunday and he may get a Curate for his Chapel. Agreed. It went on through the Times of 2 Rectors and a Curate till the very last year when finding a failure in the usual Collection I sought a Reason and now what do you think the Reason of these virtuous people may be? They say Mr. Crabbe will not omit the Sermon whether we pay or not, and therefore we need not pay: Now the worst of this Impudence is, it's Truth for I certainly do not choose to omit this Duty and must submit with the best Grace I can—but a Man seldom looses money in one Way only: Weakness is uniform, but it does vex me I own when I reflect how often I have yielded to Imposition and yet either resisted or not duly complied with the Importunities of Want: how readily do I part with money for my own Quiet and how carefully look to it when I am called upon to relieve Distress. This is [a] very common Fault. We are so scrupulous in what we give in one Case and so thoughtless in our sacrifice in another; pray forgive me this, I am angry with myself.

"People speak of the Multitude of Beggars and Impositions and Heaven knows what, but let us count the sum given in actual relief of Want through the year and we shall generally find it very little: Now here I am held to be, and am in part and by Fits, a Creature indued with some pity and yet Oh

dear Miss Charter did you know what a marvellous great sum five shillings appears, nay sometimes half that, when it is to buy Potatoes for hungry people, and how trifling when it is to make a present to a Child who has no need of it, you would be ashamed of me—I assure you I am at times of myself.—Now will you accept Lady Malet's invitation ? I love that dear Lady very much, there is a cheerful Goodness about her that is quite exhilarating. I am glad too that you have a Friend so near and would ask to be remembered by her as by your Sister, if it were not something too free, and yet why ? You and I are Friends and you shall claim any Interest you please in my Friends—by the Way, those of my own Sex are very, very few and of yours Mrs. Norris and—but you shall one Day have a List and a Story of a curious kind of Friendship, began in Septr. last year and ended in the Month of April in ye present, but this cannot be written, it must be told : do not however suppose that I am fond of using the sacred word Friendship for these transitory partialities ; it was from inadvertence, but you and I may honestly adopt it, may we not ? or how much longer Probationary Time will you demand ? I wish we could all go to Dawlish—ask Mrs. B.—We should not need a Lady Protectress indeed, for the good people would let us walk free and unblamed, would they not, but that Lady would put a stop to any Dreams of Impropriety that you might be visited with. Do let us all go ? first making us acquainted. Do you give me a Special Good Character to your Friend ? Of her, I need no more : that Friendship is sufficient. Adieu Dear. Yours faithfully, "G. C."

Of the "curious kind of friendship" that lasted from September, 1816, until April, 1817, we have no further particulars, nor of the talkative Miss Carr.

* * *

The projected trip to Dawlish with the Charter sisters, with or without "Mrs. B." as "Lady Protectress," did not come off, and it was still with hazy plans that Crabbe wrote on September 11, and still he was remembering the Charlotte Ridout episode.

"A few Words, a very few, I will find Time to return [thanks] to my dear Miss Charter for the Information she gives and the Assurance that I should be received by the Ladies at Norton frankly and courageously. That I shall put their magnanimity to Trial you need not doubt, tho' in my present perplexity and run of engagements I am at a Loss what to do and how it may be done. After long Debate, I believe my Friends will once more take a short trip to the Devonshire Coast and I am so much one in the Family that I know not how to let them go without me; What place we shall ultimately fix upon I do not know: Sidmouth tho' has most Votes: I am nearly indifferent, though two years since I said 'No more Sidmouth' but that is over and out of remembrance. I am a little vexed that my Sermon cannot be printed before I go but must be sent to me wherever I may be and my more weighty (if not more important) Correction of these many, many verses will be a Tax and a very severe one on my Time go where I may, so that if I did not think my health in some Degree demanded this Excursion of me, I should judge a Visit so short and so encumbered could not be worth the preparation: but how am I [to do] about Taunton?—As well as I can must I know be the reply and so I will not refer myself to you: It shall be as well as I can. We talk of Monday 15th.

"I would not find anything I did not like in your Letters, and therefore I hope it is all my imagination and friendly Apprehendsion when I perceive anything like Lowness of Spirits: Do say it is a mistake and that you are quite well and happy, except so far as

Sympathy for your Sister prevents you; I am truly sorry to learn she suffers and should be much pleased to find her freed from a Complaint so vexatious and which is not only a positive Evil, but deprives us of so much actual Good.

"Thank you for your kind Jealousy of Mr. Bowles' Superiority: I believe it was occasioned by Mr. Warner's Gratitude; he probably drew up the not well-written paragraph and Mr. Bowles has been I believe a kind Friend to him, but if there be no Cause of this kind, He shall stand *first* with my full concurrence. Heaven forbid that the old poetic strife and Hatred should appear again. We are all pretty good Friends.

"And did you really ask what is Friendship but *a Name?* I try very much to think it more: pray do not Endeavour to set me right if I be wrong but there is no saying what your heart may be dictating to you: with me Friendship is a great deal more and so I hope to report to you shortly and yet I will grant that there are various Degrees from almost Indifference to very cordial Regard: this idea arose from a former Letter of yours where you mention your Friend and her Son: I hope he is better and she less confined and so you have shewn my hurried and unconsidered Ramblings to this Lady! You are very naughty and unmanageable are you not? and now it is too late for me to begin to write pretty and sensible Letters and to be admired for composing such nice and elegant Effusions! No! No! it is over and in vain I should strive for such Reputation now: Well, let it go! let the Words express my meaning and convey a large Portion of Esteem and Affection and I shall be perfectly satisfied be the Style what it may: of your Friend I will not be afraid.

"We have had a sick House and my poor Anna has been confined for a few days but she will come to us I hope Tomorrow. How kind is your Admonition when you think of my Eyes and their Infirmities and mine: I find even a

little work disorders them but the Disease is rather in the eyelid and is chiefly Inflammation there. Thank you much, and in return accept Advice from me. Do not be without Exertion and Exercise; our mortal and immortal part require this. I wish I had you in some of these places where I might say 'Come we must have our Walk to-day.' I wonder why you cannot be at Sidmouth, would it not do good to your Sister's Complaint?

"Dear Lady Malet! I am far gone in Love with her Kind and obliging spirit. True I did not dine at Wilbury, but I never forget the morning and is it not better to lament for having so little than to be careless about it and say I have had enough? and yet many Dinners end thus whereas it is impossible that such mornings should. I thought of writing three lines, just to mention my purposed visit to the Coast: I had some 2 or 3 months since Expectation that one of the party would be otherwise engaged, but it was not to be and she is Miss W[aldron] still. A friend who has a power of franking is with me and gives me this Direction to you, to this at least you can make no Objection and I endeavour to vindicate you as well as I can for such as you have, but if I were not a partial Judge—Well adieu Dear Miss Charter I am truly and affectionately yours

"Geo. Crabbe."

The "kind jealousy of Mr. Bowles' superiority" was evidently a reference to the newspaper report already quoted of the three poets at the Devizes confirmation, where Bowles was mentioned first. The trip to the coast was to be made again in company of the Waldrons, and any idea that Crabbe may have had that Miss Waldron was about to marry was certainly erroneous.

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To Sidmouth, despite its memories of nearly three years earlier, Crabbe went with his friends, and thence he wrote on September 24 :

" It appears, my dear Miss Charter as if nothing went right. It was quite as difficult for me to see you at Taunton or near it, as it would have been, had you resided in the most out-of-the-way Angle in the whole Kingdom—And here I am once more with the Family who last year took me under their protection : our visit will at longest be short—how far it may be anything besides, pleasant or painful, with Things going on smoothly or perversely is yet to be experienced : it seldom falls out that when four or five persons are agreed on a Journey but that something intervenes to make them disagree after they have ventured upon it. How this may be proved in our Case, I hope I shall not have Occasion to inform you : you know my general Regard, Friendship I may call it, for the Family, but you know also that the more this Regard increases the more Danger there is that offences will arise from the wounded Delicacy of the more affectionate feelings, and even persons who know this and are in some degree guarded against it, find some inadvertent Moments in which the Knowledge is lost and the Guard forgotten.

" I have heard nothing of my Sermons nor should I have mentioned them were it not to beg of you my dear Madam in Case a copy does not reach you, that you will impute the Delay to Mr. Hatchard or at least to inevitable Circumstances and not to me.

" There is a pensive Air in your late Letters to which I cannot give a Name nor for it assign a Cause. Does —— teize you again ? or your own Mind ?

" My Head is not quite clear enough to write Letters to Ladies but you my dear Miss Charter will not require of me such as may be examined : indeed the writing such is a grievous task. A Friend indeed, one Being

whom we love and who to us is a Bosom Counsellor, who has no Severity that we should stand in Fear of, and whose Kindness places a soft and agreeable Veil over all the little Errors and Inaccuracies of the pen and leaves open all the real Affections and Tenderness of the Heart: such Reader, such Friend, who could be apprehendsive of? and such my dear Lady I require, and you possess, and I shall not heed what I write the more even if I were certain it would not pass uninspected.

"I have no prospect of seeing you on my Return, being as much One of the Party as if I were One of the Family and that is what my good People at Trowbridge are assured I shall be and so they were last year, or a new Set of Gossipers sprang up to succeed the Old ones, for even if such Matters have any Foundation more than Report the Reporters cannot know it. Happily these Surmises do no essential Harm, but they prevent agreeable Parties in forming, tho' they do no great Injury to those already formed; these Observations I would extend to visiting Ladies at their own Houses or at any other. What will people say over a Question of most questionable Nature, it has some good Effect in preventing actual Improprieties, but Alas! it more frequently separates those whose Meeting would be attended with none, but might be pleasant and soothing amid the vexations and perpetually occurring Evils of human Society. . . ."

Again was Trowbridge gossip associating its Rector's name with that of Miss Waldron, not it would seem to his disturbing, but rather a little to the tickling of his vanity.

* * *

It was rather more than a month later that Crabbe wrote again (October 29) when he was back at Trowbridge; and again he had to write apologetically. Seeing how warm was the regard that he expressed for his

correspondent, it is strange that he should have so often allowed himself to be disappointed about visiting her.

"My dear Madam,—If you be in good humour with me you are more kind than I meant you should be; yet I am [not] quite so—what shall I call it ?—unpolite ? inattentive ?—as I may and probably do appear. A month has nearly elapsed since you received from me a piece of letter and that I suspect a very poor piece and it is highly necessary for me to explain why I could send so ill-written and unconcluded a letter to any lady and especially to you. We had just then—Mr. Waldron, his son and daughter and myself—taken lodging in the Fort-Field in Sidmouth: It was the first day and nothing, not even our rooms were appropriated, but I said that I would begin by writing to my friends and I wrote 2 or 3 letters on business before I began yours, something then occurred, and in the bustle and noise etc., made by servants and people on such occasions, and called me away, after teizing me every instant while I was writing, and then there being no place to put the letters in seeing our conveyance being yet at the inn, I judged that sealing my letters was the best way to keeping them safe and I could easily [break] the seal of such as were not ready for the post. This I did and left them sealed upon the table when I was called away, there Miss Waldron saw them and judging that a letter so left was to be sent to the post office, she put them into the servant's hand and they were despatched according to their destinations. I laughed, as many do who are not pleased, and what you must think of such strange and even unkind a forgetfulness I cannot bear to reflect.

"Such however is the truth; I did not mean that my letter should go to you with such marks of carelessness, nor do I believe that it would be sent at any time had I read it in a quiet house. Quiet it seldom was: we had company of different descriptions and spent one month not unpleasantly. The sea was a most interesting object

and the walks on the other side of the town in all their autumnal glory. We found some families very pleasing to us and came away with a kind of intimacy such as people contract at these places. Mr. Waldron and I lost two of our party, his son going to escort two ladies to Plymouth and his daughter leaving us early in our journey to answer in its baptism for some infant cousin. On my table at home I found letters of several kinds and was compelled to take my thoughts from rambling by sea and land, and fix them upon the claims of various nature, some on the Head, some on the Heart. To be sure these latter claims are not many but some there are. I have got a sister and some good girls my nieces and I am not sure that I do not love four or five other persons. I found among my correspondents another obliging letter from Mrs. Mary Leadbeater who wrote the Village Dialogues : she appears to be a very amiable character. I must now my dear Miss Charter go to work and except a few visits to Bath endeavour to get my verses ready for publication and this is if my head will allow may be done . . . or Briscoe who tells her how I promised him ten years ago to join him in the north, neither promise nor man are known to me, at least are not remembered. He is a poet too have you ever heard of him ? We did not return by Taunton and if we had it would have only tantalised. Mail coaches pay no regard to friends or friendships. At Sidmouth were the family of Ridout but I knew not."

" Briscoe " may well have been a forgotten versifier, J. F. Brisco, who had published a volume of " Rhymes " some years earlier.

It may be wondered whether the " few visits to Bath " were to include one during the Royal stay, for on November 3 Queen Charlotte, the Princess Elizabeth, and suite, arrived at houses in Sydney Place, which had been specially prepared for them, but had to interrupt

their stay, for on the 6th the Princess Charlotte died. Of these public affairs scarcely any note is taken by Crabbe.

* * *

When he wrote again (on December 1) it was to explain to Miss Charter that the unfinished letter had not been the one addressed to her from Sidmouth, but one to Miss or Mrs. Hoare, and to disclaim once more any engagement to Miss Waldron, to reaffirm that should he contemplate marriage he would at once let her know, though "not without some awkward feeling."

"My dear Madam,—I was at Bath when your Letter arrived at my House, but I hope, I shall be in Time with the Sermon: be assured however that it will disappoint you, being a mere Discourse *for the Clergy* and in which the Heart and Affections have no Concern: it is Information and no more but I send it as Mr. Hatchard I perceive will not; indeed he has behaved very unkindly and this is not the only Instance of his neglect of my Friends.

"It was a Letter written to Miss or Mrs. Hoare at Cromer in Norfolk which was left in so imperfect a State: I know not how I came to fix my thoughts principally on that written to you, but I felt almost to a Certainty that I had so done as I described and it was painful to me because it appeared, at least I feared so, unkind and disrespectful.

"I am sorry you have felt again the loss of a Friend, though under the circumstances you mention, Life must have been much imbittered by her State of Health and Death much softened by her State of Mind. How soon will our Time, mine at least and yours dear not long after, but this thought should not be a melancholy one and there is not much in the World to make it so.

"I cannot write more than these few hasty Words,

for it is a Day which is dedicated to Business and even to Money-Business, an Employment not suited to me but very necessary and I will not defer the pleasure of directing the Sermon to you one Day longer. I am vexed with myself for trusting Hatchard.

"In looking at your last Letter my dear Lady, I find the repeated News of my Marriage, but I thought we had agreed to be very honestly communicative on this Occasion. Certainly I should have judged a Letter to you indispensable and yet should not have written one without some Awkward Feeling. All this however is spared me. I know not how the Report originated. Miss W[aldron] and I were together at Sidmouth, so were we at Dawlish the year before and so possibly if we live (and she unmarried) we may be at some other place in the next Autumn. Her Father is one of my best Friends here and she joins in making my hours, many of them, comfortable. Few persons more interest me and though I should grieve to loose her, I should be glad to see her placed in a comfortable state of Wife-hood. You will not now pay much Regard to reports of my Marrying, at least with this Lady.

"Heaven bless you. I am really in Haste and you should not thus detain me. In case of the Letters Crossing, let us both write and then we shall be sure. I hope you are quite well. *Write soon.* These late Letters have been on accidental Occasions. The Dove is a Dear and pleasant Creature in itself employed in its own purposes and expressing its own Feelings, but again I tell you, I cannot stay; and I am sorry for it. There are parts of your Letter to which I cannot reply now. I can only say that I am faithfully, truly, affectionately yours,

"Geo. Crabbe."

CHAPTER IX

LETTERS, 1818

"Yes, our Election's past, and we've been free,
Somewhat as madmen without keepers be;
And such desire of freedom has been shown,
That both the parties wish'd her all their own.
All our free smiths and cobblers in the town
Were loth to lay such pleasant freedom down;
To put the bludgeon and cockade aside,
And let us pass unheard and undefied."

The Borough.

CORRESPONDENCE was sometimes a leisurely matter in days before the writing of epistles had degenerated into the penning of post cards, and it was not until February 5, 1818, that Crabbe replied to Elizabeth Charter's reply to his letter of December 1, 1817.

"My dear Miss Charter,—You have thought and perhaps said cruel Things of me and I am in your Sight ungrateful and thankless; but in Mercy withdraw something from this Severity and allow for a poor giddy-headed Creature who is mortified to feel himself debarred the Pleasure of his daily Occupation by the Visitation of a Complaint, which at an early period of Life was distressing in its Effects and even alarming in its Symptons. I was some time since placing my Books in order and having to look upward for some Time on the higher spaces, I felt on altering my Situation, this Giddiness of which I complain and which no Remedies will, except in a gradual Manner, remove. I thank Heaven, that the Attack not being so severe as in former

Times I am the sooner able to resume my Pen, though even now I do it with some Degree of Caution and my poor Tales and Dialogues lie altogether neglected: I am nevertheless so forward, even with them, that I may expect, my Head permitting, to see London in April and there if I dispose of my Ware, I hope to quit Business, and dedicate the Time I may have to a more disinterested Purpose. Well, do you think in Charity of me? Will you tell me that and how you are yourself and how your Sister whom I should love to see once more: Cannot you both come hither? Anna, my Son's Creature, would be glad to see my Friends and she is a very dutiful Daughter and behaves very graciously to me: I could then too introduce you to my Friend Miss Waldron to whom Report has married me, I know not how often, but I know how truly, and there is at Bath that other young Lady Miss R., in which case I am truly sorry to own Report had a little more Veracity, nor do I think on the Subject without a considerable Degree of Self-reproof and all the Softening I can give to this is, the Consciousness that nothing was premeditated, nothing deceitful. I am afraid the Females of the Family are left by the Father much abridged of their Comforts, but they have a Relation at Sidmouth and a married Brother in good Circumstances, but perhaps I am writing of those who are unknown to you and have to ask your Forgiveness for this kind of Impertinence. I was at Bath lately and walked much in a part of the Town where I recollected our Wanderings and all that was said—at least the Subjects of which we conversed—came into my Mind. That Lady whom we visited and the younger one of whom I asked the Question that seemed to amuse you, but that was in Milsom Street and you remember too of whom we talked: Was he not in Bath? and has he not been in Taunton? I wonder if he has not.

"Did I not inform you that Mr. and Mrs. Moore were

coming to me ? I expected them this Week but he was obliged to go to Town and it is postponed. I think of being there in April if my Health permits and indeed I am best in London. Do you never go ? does Lady Malet ? It would be a charming breaking-in upon my Loneliness, for there is that in London, and my Misfortune there is to have no Medium : I am engaged too frequently or if I wish to turn that Tide of Visitation then all is still and I am more alone than I wish—now a Friend in that Situation would be admirable but in this World of Trial, things will not be as We would direct them. Was it you dear Miss Charter that said there was a Story of some Appearance in some Family, some Ghost-relation that must not be told ?—one loves forbidden Fruits of all kinds I am afraid, but was it some Message from another World, or am I right in addressing the Question to you ?

" I learn from my elder Son that I am now Granpapa ! and I expect your—what shall I say ? Congratulations or Condolement ?—Were I a Man of the World, I should say the latter ! but speaking as a Priest and a domestic Man I am very happy so to increase my Fire-side Consequence. I hope all your Connections and Friends known to me or yet strangers—if your Friends can be strangers—are well and happy. I earnestly hope that you are. It will give me great Pleasure to receive favourable Accounts of your good Sister of whom I saw too little. You would not have accused me of not stopping at Taunton had you known that I had no more Self-Government in my journey to Bath than any other Luggage nor could I leave my Friend with whom going and coming I had been associated. No ! You must not accuse but judge favourably and as a Friend. Is General Peachey and his Lady yet in their Northern Home ?—What is there in small Circumstances that they should dwell upon us so long after ? I allude to the Picture you showed me as we sat upon the Sophy—I

wish we were there now or yet better, at some place where we could look at pictures or anything besides uninterrupted by Ladies or Gentlemen, but alas! well I will not conclude so miserably. Be good and write soon to yours truly and affectionately

"GEO. CRABBE."

Miss Ridout was at Bath and the knowledge re-awakened yet again her one-time wooer's remorse for his part in a brief romance. If report only had "a little more veracity" in associating Crabbe's name with Miss Ridout, to whom he had actually been engaged, than in associating it with Miss Waldron, then it would seem that his friendliness with the latter was a little warmer than he gave his Taunton friend to believe, but perhaps such statements should not be taken *au pied de la lettre.* Miss Ridout's father had died about three months earlier.

"Mr. and Mrs. Moore" were the poet Thomas Moore and his wife—and it would appear that their visits to Trowbridge were as often promised and postponed as those of Crabbe to Taunton.

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"I must write to my dear Miss Charter a short Letter, but I would have it a thankful one: short it must be, because I am yet indisposed, though amending and am perplexed by more calls than I can attend to, and thankful I am sure it should be, for your obliging and—Conscience bids me say—unmerited Forgiveness, for so I will construe your Meaning; yet let me assure you that I did not feel my Transgression to be of that Nature: something always told me, I could not do *as I would;* but I will not extenuate the Fault: it is

more pleasant to rely upon your pardon : I would that I could receive it at Bath, but you are not there and now my Friends from Hampstead are gone, Bath is to me almost desolate.

"I thank you for the Interest you take in my Complaint : It goes off, but then I was compelled to be idle and Idleness has brought on such an Accumulation of Work of one kind or other that I feel buried in my Occupations, but I was determined to defer my Thanks to you, no longer. I hope other Friends came to you or that you have at least found Occupation and Amusement from the Listlessness which you describe. I think my dear Madam that my unguarded and brief Connection with Miss R x x cannot be *fully* known to you, though I dare believe that the indiscreet part of it has long since reached you, but if you had known *how* it terminated you would have concluded that a Renewal was all but impossible. It has caused me pain and I hope it was not altogether selfish. I did not see or try to see Miss R x x either at Sidmouth or Bath, but I was desirous of knowing something of her Views and her Situation which however I could not learn.

"Your Cousin Charles, I think, is the Gentleman whom I had the Pleasure of meeting at General Peachey's, when I had the still greater Pleasure of seeing his Cousin. And do you indeed so accurately remember the Incidents of our Morning-Excursion ? yet I need not wonder that your Memory should be as good as my own, but the Incident that made I believe the stronger Impression on my Mind, was the *hasty* View of a *portrait* as we were in the General's House in Milsom Street. Some Incidents dwell upon us, we know not why and yet I believe the Reason might be given in that Case. Some Pleasures are heightened by having a Tinge of Melancholy as some Sorrows are more poignant by admitting a Gleam of Joy to shine upon them. I do

not know that I much admired that Lady of whom you write, but I rather liked what I saw and heard and especially that casting off the kind of reserved Sadness which appeared on our Introduction to the Room.

"Perhaps you *may* be in Town! I cannot yet determine respecting my Journey thither and this horrid Election-Business adds to my uncertainty. I have a call into Cambridgeshire and one I must attend to, if the Contest in which I have a Vote proceeds and this with some other Impediments keep my own Business at a Stand, nor will my Head at present admit of much thought. I am surprised by your Account of the Demand upon Lady Malet, but then I am ignorant of the Custom, and Custom decides almost all Things of this Nature. Mr. Marsh will . . . Moderation in the Claimant and . . . Ladyship, but he will be convinced . . . he recommends the Assent and I cannot conceive a privilege extending to anything like the Sum you mention and if you mean that so much is demanded and for the Enlarging the Vault only I have no Idea of a Rector being supported in such Claim by common or ecclesiastical Law. I shall be very glad to hear that this unreasonable and I think unchristian-like claim is reduced into fair and moderate compass. I receive two Guineas very thankfully, but when the Vault is to be made and in the *Chancel*, that being the Rector's property during his life, he may of course—tho' then it would be unkind and almost inhuman—demand his own Price and perhaps something of that kind Occurs in this Case; Mr. Marsh will soon determine.

"There are Other parts of your Letter my dear Miss Charter which my head will not suffer me to reply to, further than to give you my best thanks and I say to you as you kindly do to me 'Write soon' for it will be doubly kind now when I am involved in such a Multitude of Employments; my poor Verses remaining till my Days of Leisure and those Days not arriving:

to add to my Avocations, I was obliged to take my Tithe and Glebe-Business into my own Hands and not being the most ready at these things, they take more Time than I can afford them but Habit will do much for me and by and by I shall have less Giddiness I hope and more Leisure. Adieu Dear Lady ! remember me with the kindest Wishes to your Sister and respectfully to Lady Malet ; of whose obliging Intentions to me I am not forgetful. Let me consider : this will reach you before Friday, Certainly before Sunday, that Friday and that Sunday when we are called to be very serious ! Well my dear Miss C. however serious and engaged ! Give me the Thought and I will not be unmindful of you. I shall administer . . .

" P.S.—I mentioned a short Letter, but you perceive I cannot write such to you : I must now abide by the Stories I have as I do not think of entering upon any new Relation. I have two Ghost-Tales, a more and less serious kind, and need no more. Thank you though for your obliging purpose.

" Mr. and Mrs. Moore are not come. I will think of the Hand-writing when they do."

The " Cousin Charles " of this letter would be Charles Dansey, of whom some more particular information has been given in an earlier chapter.

* * *

It was April 15 when Crabbe wrote again, and the anticipated visit to London was still unfixed, though Miss Charter was already in town at 39 George Street, Portman Square. May was to pass and much of June before he could complete his arrangements. The Mr. Bonnycastle of Woolwich to whom he refers was John

Bonnycastle (1750 ?–1821) with whom Crabbe had passed "many hours of consolation, amusement and instruction" when he first went to seek his fortunes in London. Bonnycastle was Professor of Mathematics at the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich, and father of Sir Richard Bonnycastle, an eminent military engineer, and author of notable books on Canada.

"No my dear Miss Charter I cannot be in Town while you are there, and shall think myself fortunate if I can reach London while you are at Woolwich for then indeed I might reasonably hope to see you. My journey is prevented by several Circumstances; I cannot yet prepare my new, and (most assuredly), my last Work for the Press: the Correction takes more Time than I know how to spare: my Head can bear but a little at a Time. My Duties here are urgent and, as happened in my last Visit, I have a Lady lying in that State, which Death may terminate speedily or he may linger and approach so slowly, that it will be difficult to look to a period of the Disorder, and though I could without Impropriety perhaps obtain a Substitute for such Duty, yet our Feelings are the Guides in these Cases which must be attended to: I have however some Expectation that the Lady's Brother, a Clergyman, will be soon with us and then I may look upon myself as freed from this melancholy but imperious call. I have not been well for several weeks past and my Head bears so little that, when I fix in my Mind the third Week in May for my leaving Trowbridge, I am very doubtful, how far I may be justified for that Determination: In fact, I see too much of my own Infirmity to resolve upon Anything. Woolwich is not unknown to me. There I think lives Mr. Bonnycastle an old Friend, once a young one, who helped me to pass some Months which, otherwise, would have been very unpleasant, and were very trying.

I dined with him about 5 years since, before my Days of Widowhood and remember a pleasant Meeting after five and Twenty years had elapsed since the parting. I am likewise in some Measure at a loss respecting the Duties of my Church in my Absence, not willing to burden my Son too much and yet not able to find, at present, an Assistant.

" These, my dear Miss Charter, are some of the small Cross Accidents in Life, which it is fruitless to lament, but which must be my pleas for still remaining in the Country when I am anxious to be in Town and to say the Truth am weary of reading, writing and Correcting Verses. Moore has three Times disappointed me and I now cease to think of his Visit, at least till my Return Home again. If the Signature will answer your Purpose I have it and will take it to town, having I think preserved his Letter and if not that is very easily procured. I believe he is afraid to visit an old Priest, fearing a Gravity he would not find and perhaps something that he would, but this is Conjecture.

" We are troubled by our Wiltshire Candidates and I have the misfortune to have three Votes for different places all Contested, and one I believe which will not be. I must now give up all Stories of Ghostly and other Beings, having finished my purposed Quantity, and Correction is now all my Business with these Things, beside this, I have already Two Ghost-Relations, one serious and one of the more comic kind and these will I daresay be thought sufficient. Will you do me the Honour to remember me to Captain Dansey ? I have perfect recollection of your Cousin, not then married. It is vexatious that I must thus ever wish to meet you and never gain the Meeting. Here are no imperious Chancellors, no Ladies to forbid—I should wonder if there were, and yet it seems as if it could not be, yet I work hard too and having to go from home a few Days I take my Work with me, as Ladies do sometimes theirs

into Company, when it serves, as perhaps mine will, for Appearance, and to make our Friends believe that we have some Dilligence. I hope Lady Malet and her Family are well and that she has settled to her satisfaction that singular Claim of the Rector which you mentioned. Pray convey my best Regards to your Sister. I would you were both within a Walk! . . . This is Saturday Night and not one Sermon have I for the Morrow, ready or nearly ready—O! I shall be so glad when this poetical Labour is over and I can do as I will. Now will you be good and write before you leave Town and say how long you mean to Stay, that if possible I may gain a Day; such Day as you gave me at Bath. I Scarcely know how to direct to you, but must guess as I can. If you could see the Confusion of my Table and the papers before me you would wonder that I can know what I am about and I sometimes think I do not. Heaven bless you, pardon this very hasty, but necessarily hasty Letter and believe . . ."

* * *

It was June 6 when Crabbe wrote again, and Miss Charter had gone to Woolwich, for the letter was directed to her in the care of "Charles Dansey, Esq. Woolwich, Kent." There appear, however, to have been two gentlemen of the name in that neighbourhood, and the letter first to have gone to the wrong house, for it is endorsed "No such Person known at Charles Dansey's, Esqre on Woolwich Common, T. Jenkins."

"My dear Miss Charter,—Well do I know your Opinion of my Silence. Will you patiently hear my Defence. I have been preparing for my Journey to Town and the Business which is its principal Cause for

many Weeks, nay Months past, but I have been and am withheld and obliged to remain where I am. My own health is far, very far from being what it was, when you and I met at Bath and at Lady Malets. My Spirits are enfeebled by Disappointment. I have more to do than I know how to perform, not my Neighbours only but my Friends are ill, and one, more especially, who is very dear to me, has not been able to taste Food—otherwise than as Medicine and the thin Diet of the sick may be so called—for many Weeks. I attend almost daily upon a young consumptive Lady who will not long require me, but who does at present, a Miss Gould, whose Name I mention that you may know I write of Realities.

"My Head is often so heated by the Exertion, slight as it is, of Writing and Correcting, that my Work (if I may so call it) proceeds very slowly and this vile Election business, which I abominate, tho' it does not much engross my Time does that of persons, whom I want to see on other Concerns. I am moreover called, by having votes, to very distant places and have Letters from Friends whom I must not neglect to hold myself in Readiness for a long Journey and a noisy contended Election. Can I then Dear Miss Charter dispose of my Time, Can I order my own Way? Indeed I cannot. Were you at Bath, were you within a Day's journey, it would rejoice me to share the Comfort of a friendly Meeting and much more, to find myself in a place where I could be with you and retire to your Company from the Vexation and Hurry of some of my Employments and the Anxiety and nervousness that others occasion, and this indeed would be the Gratification of no feeble wish, but I am not so situated: engaged by daily affairs, involved in Business,—for I have lost him who was my Helper and if I may use so proud a Word, my Steward and Bayliff—and in the Absence of my Son, burdened with all the Duty of a populous Parish, my

prospects are all shut up and I really only look to the Day for what it may bring forth. You accuse me wrongfully then dear Lady, indeed you do; and shall I honestly confess to you; were I with you you would say, What is become of your Spirits? and you would grow so weary, that you would command me, 'There get to Trowbridge again and do not spoil Good Company by your Dulness and Dejection.'

"How is your Sister's Health? how her Sight? How are you? If I cannot meet, I can at least participate in your Sympathies and affections. Moore has not yet been with me and I suspect will not come to the House of a Man, whom he takes to be a grave old priest and from whom he looks for no Amusement. Mr. Bowles is I think in Town. Have you seen Lord Byron's two last Poems, the 4 Canto of *C. Harold* and *Beppo?*—neither quite equal to him but both superior to other peoples.

"I know not where you now are and have a Mind to direct to Taunton again. but I think your Letter mentions that you do not expect to be at Woolwich till June: to Woolwich then I had better direct. I wait for Letters respecting Election Business, but may I think now indulge the Hope of being in Town within 2 or 3 weeks. . . .

"Adieu! my dear Madam, you have a very, very dull Correspondent, but my Mind is too much taken up by the more material Cares and Business of this World, as in a great measure to exclude the more rational and purer kind. If you were at Bath I would cast my Cares aside and take a Day, if you would give it me, but you are not and other places are not so good. You are in the midst of Company. . . ."

* * *

The "Election business" which worried the poet and threatened to call him away to East Anglia was par-

ticularly disturbing in Wiltshire. Wherever there were contests this General Election of 1818 was hotly contested, and nowhere probably more hotly than in Wiltshire. The story of it, with all the attacks and counter-attacks in the way of letters and advertisements, was afterwards printed in a volume of 400 pages.[1] The Tory candidates, supporting Lord Liverpool's Ministry, were Paul Methuen, the ex-member, and William Long Wellesley,[2] while John Benett of Pyt House[3] stood on behalf of the Whig Opposition. While the election business was on Crabbe's friend Joseph Everett, who lived on Milford Hill, Salisbury, died (June 24). The poet is said to have stayed with the Everetts frequently on his journeys from London to Trowbridge.

The volume referred to gives many interesting and entertaining illustrations of the amenities of electioneering in those good old times of a little less than a century ago. One of the advertisements on behalf of Wellesley—who, owing to his connection with the Duke of Wellington, appears to have regarded the Battle of Waterloo as a good electioneering card—must suffice as sample of the " literature " of the election :

[1] " Kaleidoscopiana Wiltoniensia ; or, a Literary, Political and Moral View of the County of Wilts During the Contested Election in June, 1818."

[2] Immortalised in a couple of lines in the parody of Crabbe in the " Rejected Addresses " :

" Bless every man on earth, who ought to give
'Long may Long Tylney Wellesley Long Pole live !' "

[3] John Benett of Pyt House, Tisbury, was the representative of a very ancient Wiltshire family. His estates having devolved on Mr. Vere Fane, the latter assumed the name of Fane-Benett and on his marriage that of Benett-Stanford. The present owner of Pyt House is Mr. John Montague Benett-Stanford.

"WILTSHIRE ELECTION

Nomination at Devizes on the 18th of June instant,

The glorious Anniversary of the Battle of

WATERLOO!

It is no less extraordinary than gratifying that the Day on which the illustrious

DUKE OF WELLINGTON

Obtained his most splendid Titles should be commemorated in this great and independent County by the

NOMINATION OF HIS NEPHEW

WILLIAM LONG WELLESLEY, Esq.

To be one of our Representatives in Parliament.

We cannot err in supporting the Man who has fought with that hero in the midst of some of those Battles which have saved our Country from Perdition.

We shall surely do right in electing this near Relative of the Noble Duke to be our Representative, who now nobly steps forward to secure our Country from Tyranny.

Stick close to the Question :—Wellesley and Independence!

Hereafter for your Children's Children, or the disgraceful Slavery of Clubs and Quorum.

Let us then rally around him on the Day of Nomination, when it is earnestly hoped that the Friends of *Mr. Long Wellesley* will convince the World of their Loyalty and Independence by appearing in his Favour."

In this contest, as we learn from his son, Crabbe's sympathies were on the side of Benett, who included among the Committee of his supporters at Salisbury Crabbe's friend Canon Douglas. In the *olla podrida* of election letters and squibs already referred to there are four letters addressed from Trowbridge to the Wiltshire freeholders signed "A Clothier." A reply to one of these shows that the pen-name was by some supposed to be one adopted by the Rector—"you will perceive

that the Clothier is a very choleric gentleman—quite a crab!" The anonymous letter-writer retorted: "Let me assure you, however, that there is no 'Crabb' in my blood," and Crabbe favoured Benett, while "A Clothier" was a strong supporter of Long Wellesley.

* * *

The contest had come to a close six weeks earlier with the triumphant return of the Tories, and Crabbe had been to Cambridge to vote, and had paid a visit to London, where he had witnessed the scenes in the Westminster Election at the Covent Garden hustings, when he again sat down at Trowbridge to write to Elizabeth Charter.

"My dear Madam,—I am every Day, if not fulfilling a Duty at least performing a Task, and I rise two Hours earlier that I may be ready with my Verses at the Time I have promised: I may then be pardoned some Irregularity of Correspondence and do pray pardon me. I was in Town some Weeks since. I was first Called to Cambridge to vote for two Gentlemen who had claims upon my Services and on my Return I stayed in London to avoid if I could voting at our Wiltshire Election and yet if I had been wanted in one part I held myself in Readyness to set off, so that I was engaged to the place, and depended upon my Friends then in Town for keeping me out of Idleness: I was in Covent Garden during most part of the Contest, but was perfectly quiet and walked through the great Collection of people as calmly and undisturbed as if they had known how insignificant and indifferent I was; yet not so entirely, I had a secret wish or two for my Friend Sir Sam: Romilly [1] who does

[1] Sir Samuel Romilly [1757–1818], the famous law-reformer. Solicitor-General in the All-the-Talents Ministry of 1806. After the death of his wife he gave way to despondency and on Nov. 2, 1818, only a few weeks after the date of Crabbe's letter, he died by his own hand.

BATH

(From an original water-colour by David Cox, in the possession of A. M. Broadley.)

me the Honour of both saying and doing very kind Things.

"You are correct respecting my Want of musical Taste, but if I had not the happy Defect, I dare not to have indulged an Inclination, having from four to five hundred Lines with all their Corrections to finish in the Day, and my Head is sometimes unequal to the Duty. I know not my dear Miss Charter what you will say to me, or think of me. Certainly I received your Letter, but there are times when we know not what to write, we feel our deficiency, our Intentions respecting Journeys etc., are not fixed and all the View before is in confusion. In this State of Mind, we wait for clearer prospects, that we may be enabled to say what we mean to do. Many of my Friends, particularly those of Rood Ashton, Mr. Long and his Family, were at Salisbury and one of the Ladies, a friend of some standing kindly offered me a convenient and pleasant Mode of going, to say nothing of the Inducement of the Family, but I felt the Weight of my Obligation and continued my daily task, where I now am.

"Certainly my dear Lady, I do not set such Value on my Company as to think much Apology is necessary when I cannot give it to my Friends. A Man at my Time of Life, indued with no particular Arts or Talents, no performer nor even Admirer of Music, not gifted with the Knack of Story-telling, nor entertaining in any Way by which Company is amused; No! No! my dear Miss Charter, such Man may be absent or present without any Loss or Gain and is probably best where he generally is, in his own Study. We have had rather a sick House, my Daughter-in-Law is not yet recovered from a Serious Indisposition: Indeed these married Ladies may have their Comforts, and I hope they have for I am sure they have their pains and Disappointments, or perhaps the Disappointments come to their Husbands and Fathers. Here I was counting of some

Minikin to set of my Knee long before this Time and no such Creature appears. Well! tis not with us and we must submit, and Here is another of my Favourites, Miss Waldron, has been ill and is by no means recovered yet: She is going into Warwickshire and I shall be left almost alone to sigh and rhyme and copy and correct as I can."

* * *

When next the poet wrote his friend was at Christchurch, in Hampshire, and he was on his travels, for he began the letter on Monday, September 14, at Bath, and finished it on the following Thursday at Norwich, on his way to visit his friends the Hoares at Cromer.

" 'Not write to you' my dear Miss Charter ?—What must you think of my Temper and Disposition, if I did not take the very first opportunity of asking your Pardon, if anything in my Letter displeased or offended you ? Would to God I was now with you that I might beg of you personally to forgive me, if I suffered any Pettishness or Indisposition so far to prevail over me, as to cause me to write in such Way as I suppose from your Letter I must have done. Do Dear Lady forgive a poor nervous Being who for a Moment forgot how good you were. Indeed I perceive in your Letter, that kind and generous passing over an offence though you felt it, which ought to command my best thanks and does command them.

" You are a dear good Creature I do believe, and are willing to hope the best for the Friend whom you have so kindly adopted: Believe me that I am not insensible of your Goodness and the Sweetness of Temper that is willing to impute the best possible Motives to the most apparent, but I trust not real, Inattention—I have been hurried and teized, but I will not say much for myself for I had rather owe my Forgiveness to the Goodness of your own Heart, than to any Excuse that I can offer.

"I wish I was with you. We should have some pleasant Walks within View of the Sea, that first great Object of my Admiration and indeed the first of my Notice. I was an Infant Worshipper of its Glory, but I have only Time to write a few Words and like other offenders to ask at once Excuse and Favour.

"I received your Letter just as I was setting out for this place in my Way to London and from thence without stopping one Night, to Cromer in Norfolk, there by appointment of long standing to pass 2 weeks with my Friends Mr. Hoare and his Family—From thence I go to my Sister at Aldborough in Suffolk and stay a few Days. Then I mean to cross the Country to Belvoir Castle the Seat of the Duke of Rutland, where I am invited and shall stay a few Days. Beyond this I have no immediate Appointment, and if it were possible to go to Town and so to Christ-church I do think I should venture to join your party, but you will be gone! and I must not indulge the thought—No! Dear Miss Charter pleasant as it would be I dare not. You will scarcely read this Scrall written in Hurry and Confusion, in an Inn, where I am to depart very soon, but at least you will read enough to know that I am really sorry to have given you Cause to write as you did and yet with that angelic Sweetness of Temper that you make me more ashamed of my Carelessness.

"Now will you write and tell me that I am entirely forgiven? I hope to be at my Resting Place on Thursday the 17 ins. and glad shall I be to hear from you there and there too I can write more legibly than the Pens and Ink of this house will now permit me. Yes Dear a Walk with you below the Cliff,—for there is a Cliff or Rocks are there not?—would be very pleasant . . .

"I met Bowles at Mr. Methuens some Days since and he told me he had the pleasure of meeting you etc. I was to have gone from thence to Bowood to meet a

large Company and Miss Edgeworth among them but I could not—I should be content if I could meet you at Christchurch but that I fear——.

" *Norwich Thursday* 17.

" P.S.—Neither on Tuesday night nor on yesterday morning could I place this poor Travelling Letter in the Office : I was too late and too early. I am now in the Metropolis of Norfolk in my Way to Cromer and shall put you to I know not what Expense for postage. I wish you would permit my Franks to pass and then I could write with a clearer Conscience. Now remember that my Residence at Cromer will not be long : perhaps not the Time I mention tho' I think not much less—I am Dear Miss C. faithfully yours, G. C."

* * *

The next day Crabbe wrote—presumably from Cromer, to his newly found friend Mrs. Leadbeater in Ireland, in a strain of humorous self-reproach over his delight in the social life of London :

" The world has not spoiled you, Mary, I do believe. Now it has me ;—I have been absorbed in its mighty vortex, and gone into the midst of its greatness, and joined in its festivities and frivolities, and been intimate with its children. You may like me very well, my kind friend, while the purifying water, and your more effectual imagination, are between us ; but come to England, or let me be in Ireland, and place us together till mind become acquainted with mind—and then ! ah ! Mary Leadbeater ! you would have done with your friendships with me ! Child of simplicity and virtue, how can you let yourself be so deceived ? Am I not a great fat rector, living upon a mighty income, while my poor curate starves with six hungry children upon the scraps that fall from the luxurious table ? Do I not visit the horrible London, and enter into its abominable

dissipations? Am I not going this day to dine on venison and claret? Have I not been at Election dinners, and joined the Babel confusion of a Town Hall? Child of simplicity, am I fit to be a friend to you, and to the peaceful, mild, pure and gentle people about you? One thing is true—I wish I had the qualification. But I am of the world, Mary."

To this Mary Leadbeater replied: "If the graceful figure I saw in London, described by my father as 'the youth with the *sour* name and the *sweet* countenance' has become somewhat corpulent, that is a consequence of good humour as well as good living; and why not partake of vension and claret with the moderation which such a mind will dictate."

* * *

The fortnight at Cromer was seemingly lengthened rather than shortened. Crabbe was in London (35 Great Maddox Street) on his way back to Trowbridge by the time that he sat down to write again to Elizabeth Charter—and it was the last day of October.

"My dear Miss Charter,—Be in Charity with me: I had it not in my power to act in Conformity with my Purpose: my Stay in Suffolk was prolonged by unforeseen Circumstances to a Date of which I had no Conception on my first setting out. I should very much have loved an Excursion to the Coast and especially to your part of it, but I found the Impossibility while you were there, and when you were gone the Desire went away and I resigned the purpose without Regret.

"You sometimes accuse me of Ingratitude or what amounts to the same Thing of Delay: Alas! my Dear Lady, I am involved in one or other Kinds of Business and Care that writing even to such a Friend, is put off and tho' not forgotten postponed from Day to Day and

now I am and indeed for some Time have been ignorant how and where to address you. Shall I conclude that you have returned to your Home at Taunton ? or are you still with your beloved Lady Malet ? I wish I knew, but wishes on this and most other Occasions are painful Things and bring on Mortification and Disappointment. If I direct to you at Norton Cottage my Letter will reach you I conclude and if not, what is there in it that is worth regretting or if it arrives, what is there worth regarding ?

" Now if one could see you as at Bath ! within a few Miles, at such Visiting Distance, and where our Walks might be renewed, something might be said for such Pleasure, but what will a Letter convey ?—And yet you contrived to convey much in yours, for you told me you forgave me all my Pettishness and yet I think you treated me something as they do humoured Children—by the Way, can you humour wayward Minds ? you should not and when I read your Pardon, my Conscience told me it was more than I deserved.

" But come, I will tell you something of my Travels. From Cromer, the Residence of my Friend Mr. Hoare, I went to Norwich and past two Days with Mrs. Opie who has written some pleasant Books, particularly the *Father and Daughter*. She has been some years the Widow of a Painter and lives now with her Father Dr. Alderson. I left Norwich for Aldborough in Suffolk where I found a Sister with whom I past some Days, and two with a Brother near that place. I then went to Beccles the Residence of my Sister-in-law and the Father of my Son's Wife. With that Sister, who has Business in London I am come to see if I can do any myself, and yet I know not how to set about it, for I have Verses to sell and have too much Diffidence to set a large Price upon my own Work and yet too much pride to take a small one. I must, if possible, get somebody to take this part from me. If I ask 2000£ and

they will bid me only half the Sum what will my Vanity do ?—Go home I believe with my Goods and wait the Rise of the Market.

" If you chide me heartily, I will say you do not make Allowance for my Situation. One full of, I know not what Variety, but of Trouble I think and certainly of Doubt and Difficulty and as a Friend I expect your Sympathy.

" But how are you and how your Sister ? I wish you could be near that I might learn all this from you. In a Walk round half a Dozen Streets or through them, stopping here and there and seeing this and that Friend, we should find Opportunity to talk of all we had to converse about and could make our Remarks as other good people do, with all the Wisdom and Kindness we could command.

" You had Pleasure I hope to the End of your Journey and not much Pain in parting, some you must have : it is in your very Nature : you must feel, but I trust it is Feeling corrected by the best of all Correctors your Piety and Resignation. I shall be glad to know that I have your good Wishes for my Success, but indeed I am a sad Maker of Bargains. If I direct my Letter improperly you will set me right : it would be kind indeed if you could do so in all I have to do. Farewell my dear Miss Charter : do you ever see *Him* now or is he quite and clean gone from you since that Time ?—yet why do I enquire, if I remind you of anything unpleasant ? Forgive me that too and believe me, Yours faithfully and affectionately, " Geo. Crabbe."

Mrs. Opie, whom Crabbe visited at Norwich, was the widow of John Opie, the painter, a woman who must have had much in sympathy with the poet. She was herself a writer of verse that met with very warm approval—she was a novelist one of whose books, " Father and Daughter," a critic in " Blackwood's Magazine" confidently declared would " endure till pity's self

is dead." It would seem as though that consummation devoutly to be deplored had already arrived, for we fancy that it is many years since the appearance of the last edition of this "appalling piece of domestic tragedy" —if indeed it has ever been reissued since its author's death. Now, Amelia Opie is best remembered as a personality, as a charming woman who had a real genius for friendship, as one friend put it, " her manners would have graced a court and not encumbered a cottage." It is to be regretted that Crabbe says so little of his association with Mrs. Opie.

The poems about which Crabbe was negotiating were his new " Tales of the Hall "—of his bargain we learn something more in a later letter.

* * *

It was near Christmas (December 23) when Crabbe wrote again, and was again apologetic over not having been able to carry out his design for the seaside meeting in the autumn.

" My dear Miss Charter,—I have just read your Letter—I mean for the first Time—and am desirous of returning my Thanks as soon as they can be written. You are very good and mild in your gentle Censures of my Wanderings and Disobedience, but I *can* give some Account of myself for at least three months past that if it will not be a complete Apology for me, will at least incline your placable Mind to Forgiveness.

" I not only wished to join your Party on the Coast, but I indulged the Thought for a considerable Time, till I found myself, in Suffolk, beset by insurmountable Hindrances. I have in Beccles a Sister—Sister to Mrs. Crabbe—with whom I have been in Habits of Friendliness, but not Intimacy, till on a Visit to that Place, where also reside the Family of my Son's Wife,—We

became more associated and she having to go to Town on Business, accompanied me and we dwelt together in Maddox Street a longer Time than either of us expected ; so that a Month was thus added to the one spent in Visits to my Friends and on Business of any Importance, none indeed but the usual Kind of filing and polishing rough and harsh Lines : With this Lady, Politeness would have demanded my return to Beccles if Affection had not and there, by that kind of gentle Compulsion which your Sex knows so well how to apply, I was induced to stay one other Week : At length I came to Town unconnected with Company and then prepared in earnest for that kind of negotiation for which I am so much unfitted by Nature and Habit. Mr. Hatchard who appeared to claim (I know not why) a first offer of my Tales, etc.,—whatever Appellation they may yet bear—and I in part complied, but we were at some loss how to act, for I would not put it in his power to say ' I refused the Work on the Terms offered ' neither would I any more publish in the former Way : but as Mr. Hatchard himself as we were talking on the Subject mentioned a thousand Pounds as the Sum up to which he did not think it possible that I should aspire or he advance, I put an End to our Conference by assuring him that I should expect considerably more or would take my Marketings back again. We had some Difficulty respecting the Copies yet in Hand, but I hope Mr. Murray [1] and he will have no Disputation ; for to that

[1] John Murray [1778–1843]. In Samuel Smiles's "Memoirs of John Murray" (Vol. II, pp. 71–2) will be found a fairly full account of the transaction by which Murray acquired rights in the whole of Crabbe's poems for a lump sum of £3000. No mention, however, is made of the meeting at 50 Albemarle Street for the reading of the tales. At this time Murray's drawing-room was the daily resort of visitors of distinction, and his dinner-parties were equally popular. Amongst the guests who constantly foregathered at Murray's hospitable table were Moore, Scott, Hook, Hallam, Croker, Campbell, and Gifford. Mrs. Bray in 1819 speaks of a daily "literary levee" taking place in his drawing-room between 3 and 5 p.m.

Gentleman I have disposed of my Manuscript and Copyright of the former Articles under certain Stipulations. He has been liberal enough I think in his proposal and whenever the Promissory Notes now in my Hands are realized I will tell you what I have done, but these Things are so visionary in this trading Kingdom, where no one's Wealth is to be ascertained, that till a Bargain is concluded by actual Delivery on one Side and Payment on the other, it can scarcely be called good or bad, but so far as I may give it a Name, I call it good, at least I am satisfied.

"My Work is before me and I have now the first printed Sheet. I almost tremble at my Task, but as I got over the Reading three of the Tales to some Gentlemen assembled at Mr. Murray's on purpose to judge them you may allow that I have a portion of Courage or Fortitude and I hope it will be as much as I have Occasion for.

"I admire Lady Malet and ever did since I heard of her and especially since I saw her in her own Family: does she never come to Bath? I should feel much Pleasure in the thought of meeting you in her Society and such Weather as now presents itself would do admirably for walking from Street to Street, and from Friend to Friend: Mr. Hoare and his Family I may look for in the latter End of next Month, but at present Bath though full of Company has no Call upon me that I can obey with Satisfaction. I found my Son, his Wife and my few Friends and Neighbours in their usual State of Health and after a few Calls and Visits, I hope to sit down quietly and attend closely to Mr. Murray's Business, unless when called Away by Duties of more importance. Will you remember me to your Sister and give my respectful good Wishes to Lady Malet and will you accept them for yourself. They are of little Value and no Use, but very Sincere and may be relied upon. I cannot refer to many Things in your Letter but I

heartily thank you for all you communicate and do I pray my Dear Lady recollect that tho' the Date of your Letter is so early in the Month and this of mine is so late, yet was yours replied to as soon as it was read, for I am not yet settled at Home where as my Son expected me earlier, he did not send my Letters to Town and in Consequence of this I had many to answer, fortunately being almost all Letters of Business, they were answered by a few Words, and now my dear Miss Charter I must for the present say Farewell! and will trust to your native Kindness and Patience for a favourable Construction of all my Failings and Omissions. I am glad to hear of your Health and Comforts and should be yet more pleased to witness them. If you have a prospect of seeing Bath you will give me the Pleasure of knowing it. Once more with kind regards to your Sister,

" I remain Dear Miss Charter . . ."

CHAPTER X

LETTERS, 1819–20

"Our thoughts will tend
To those whom we are conscious to offend."
Tales of the Hall.

AFTER the year 1818 the frequency of the correspondence appears to have become lessened, or else fewer of the letters were preserved by their recipient; there are but four to Elizabeth Charter during 1819. The poet was busy seeing through the press that which he felt was to be his last work, those "Tales of the Hall," in which he gave evidence of his genius as Nature's best and sternest painter as marked as in the work of his earlier prime.

Before giving the next letter of the Charter series we may include one which Crabbe wrote evidently to his brother-poet Thomas Moore. He appears to have neglected to go and see Moore when visiting Bowles, and the susceptible Irishman to have felt hurt at the neglect.

"Yes, I confess that you have some Cause,—Cause-apparent—for what you obligingly term Jealousy but Cause-real I would not, could not give you. Sloperton Cottage[1] is first announced to me in your own letter. 'Near to Melksham' they told me, of whom I enquired and the account given by Mr. Bowles was by no means luminous: I could write upon the Subject and send

[1] Thomas Moore lived at Sloperton Cottage, Bromham, Wilts.

some strong Reasons—one, for instance, being a Residence about 150 Miles distant—for this Silence and all that looks like Inattention, but is not what it appears: Be then my dear Sir fully assured that every Doubt of my Regard and affectionate Remembrance was the result of your own kind Expectations, which you thought were not fulfilled and being convinced yourself, then be a good and faithful Advocate for me,—if her own Generous and Willingness to think well of me do not render such Office unnecessary—with that Lady, who if she were forgetful would be ungrateful also. How often have I thought how frequently spoken of her: my Babes (a married pair whom I keep tame in my House) will witness what were their Father's Declarations and Boasts on his Return from Town: Mrs. Moore is not a Stranger in the Parsonage at Trowbridge, and far be it from any there to receive her as one: Do—Will you not?—say everything for me respectful and affectionate: I hope to be at Bowood on Tuesday the 6th and feel the additional motive for my Visit very powerfully. I have not seen the Edinburgh Review, but can readily suppose that Mr. Moore's Grace, Delicasy and Flow of Expression would do Mr. Crabbe much Service, but I cannot see whereby Mr. Crabbe's Kind of Actualities would make a Return.

"Among other things, I mean to enquire after and hope to hear good of our Friend Rogers; whom I may expect to meet in Town. Once more be good to me and retain all the favourable in your Mind when we meet at Bowood and then you will come, I know not whether to success, but assuredly to give much Pleasure in a promised Visit to your obliged and faithful,

"Geo. Crabbe."

* * *

The visit to town hinted at was duly paid, and Crabbe was back again at Trowbridge when on the 26th of

March he took up again the thread of his sentimental correspondence.

"Once more my dear Miss Charter has your unmerited Kindness excited in me some Conscientious feelings, which would be painful were they not softened by Reflections, that in some Degree reconcile me to myself. Indeed I have many times reflected upon my Debt to you and consider my dear Friend, that we oftentimes think more of those to whom we know ourselves indebted and with more Gratitude and Affection, than we do of those whom we have paid and feel the Amount discharged and the Ballance settled. If thinking would procure my Pardon, be fully assured that I have thought and still think of all your Goodness to me, your patience and your waiting for my Amendment. Thanks Dear. I will be good as naughty Children say, and I need not promise to be mindful of you, because that I have been and am and will be.

"I have been much engaged: for a considerable Time by Business in Town and since I left it, by the same business in its different Branches. I am unwilling to have a last Work go into the World without all the Attention and Care that I could bestow. Then I have been hindered by Indisposition which (at Bath, while I visited the Family of my Friend Mr. Hoare) became illness and illness I sincerely regretted, so kindly did the Ladies of the Family, give me Support and Comfort: Married Ladies, too, some of them much engaged by calls of another kind: I am indeed happy to know certain Beings of your Sex, who make me half ashamed of my own but very proud of their Regard and I am grateful enough to know and feel that you my dear Miss Charter would have Administered to the Comforts of a man who however negligent he may sometimes appear, still knows the Value of your Friendship and is highly gratified by feeling that he possesses it.

" I wrote to General Peachey as soon as I knew that Lady Malet was in Bath and fully purposed to go immediately over, but the next Post brought me the Intelligence which your Letter repeats and informed me that the dear Lady was called hastily and was just then on her way ! After this I received an obliging Invitation from the General and spent 2 days nearly with him and Mrs. Peachey, but the 2nd day she was ill and could not join her party at Dinner, nor could I feel pleasantly, for I cannot but Pity the Master of an house who has to assume Cheerfulness when his Mind is filled with affectionate Apprehendsion. I think I must on such Occasion have put off my Guests, but I am ignorant of the immense force and power of the Rules of Politeness, and when they run counter to those of Nature, I am sadly afraid I must give them up, but do not expose me, I had indulged a little Hope, a little private Hope of somebody being there.

" Yes poor dear Douglas is gone ! generous, frank, lively, hospitable and kind with many virtues, much worth, high Spirit and rich Mind, with Learning, Knowledge of the World and Superiority to all that was mean, pitiful and vulgar, he lived the Delight of a numerous Acquaintance and died to make very sincere and lively feelings. I will not take the Shady Side of the picture. We have our Shades Dear ! All that concerned us was the little arbitrary Spirit and that we will forgive. The Ladies of the Family demand our Sympathy.

" I am busy daily, but with daily hope of Leisure by and by. I will then seek health. I hope to go to some places on the Coast, but—Cromer excepted for about 2 Weeks—I cannot forsee any Measures of this kind. Can we not meet ? I should be very glad & would turn to your part of the Country with much satisfaction. You are sad Rakes; always Company ! You sigh for Solitude ! fie ! fie ! you are surrounded, and that Week

after Week and Month after Month ! Well ! so much the better if you love it, and I am sure you love your friends, and happily have many and what Chance have I among all that Troop ?—At Bath indeed, or perhaps at some out-of-the-way Village near the Sea, one might have an Hour or two : but even this is problematical. I daresay, your sister is more quiescent and sits at home like a Nun in her Cell, while you with all your jolly Company are going from place to place ' Singing blithely Songs of Joy—bidding Care and Grief depart ' —and I hope they went at your bidding.

" I have rather a Gloom in my House at this time ; my poor Daughter-in-Law, for a time promises her Husband and his Father, what a few months has hitherto destroyed ; Her Health suffers too, else we could easily bear the Disappointment, & now alas Submission is our Duty. My Son is an affectionate Husband and I think the young pair have never been parted for more than a few hours since they married : they have dwelled with me two years and I trust we shall not part till either it becomes voluntary on all sides or till the final parting. Miss Williams was a visitor at Mr. Waldron's, a Friend at Trowbridge : She is a sensible Woman and if opportunity offered you would not be displeased with her Conversation. Miss Everett likewise was with us, Daughter of a Banker lately deceased and Sister to some Young Men whom I have met but of whom I know little. We dined together at Mr. Douglas' and I visited at Mr. Everett's house.

" This is a sad dull letter my dear Lady and you must be in your usual good Humour and forgive it. Remember me affectionately to your Sister : She has no Dislike to the Word I hope, perhaps she would say, No ! from the proper person : Well ! but allow it nevertheless & do say, how she is ? I am sure I have affectionate Wishes, and now, as I must bid you Good Night :—Do tell me how are you likely to

dispose of your Time—you will not be all the Summer at your present place of Residence. What think you of Hampshire again ? or of any of the Devon, or Dorsetshire places where Company fly and rest and fly again. I was invited to Mr. Methuen's [1] our Member of P. to meet Moore and Bowles but even so tempted, do not go. I have not Health enough to hazard such Visit. I admire Lady M., believe me that I do, and assent to all you write of silent and subdued Sorrow. It is like your own—I have a suffering Sister too for whom I feel much and a good little Niece to whom I write, for I think it gives her Pleasure. May I think so when I am writing to —— ? and yet why ask ? What motive can my kind Friend have but to receive and yield it ? & indeed you do give it : do not think me so insensible to your Goodness. If it were not for the Shame I would say,—write again ! but I think I see you, patient as you are —looking between forgiveness and reproach & silently conveying—' how dare you ask it ' ? True Dear ! and yet—so unreasonable is Man, I do—luckily the Paper cannot blush ; cannot be ashamed : so I will boldly say it. Do Dear Miss Charter ! Write again soon ! and let the little Dove be speedy. I am indeed and in very truth Yours affectionately, Geo. Crabbe."

" Poor dear Douglas " was the Rev. William Douglas, who had broken up the day of Crabbe's visit to Lady Malet and Elizabeth Charter. He had died at the age of forty-seven at Westminster—of which he was Canon —six days earlier, and was buried at St. George's Chapel, Windsor.

[1] Paul Methuen [1779–1849] was raised to the peerage on 13 July, 1838, as Baron Methuen of Corsham. In July, 1810, he married the eldest daughter of Sir H. P. St. John Mildmay, of Dogmersfield, Hants. He represented Wiltshire at Westminster in several parliaments. The present Lord Methuen is his grandson.

* * *

There was a six months' silence before Crabbe wrote again, and during the interval he had once more been in London, this time for the publication of the "Tales of the Hall," for which, with the copyright of his early poems, John Murray had paid the handsome sum of three thousand pounds. During this visit he was one of the guests at the Royal Academy banquet—sitting at the Ambassador's table—and he described the dinner (which was "like all very large dinners") in a letter to Miss Waldron, but as that letter is given in his biography it need not be repeated here. On May 26 Mrs. Opie wrote to him about this London visit, chaffing him about being too much with Samuel Rogers, "indeed as you have nothing in the least like a *bear* in your composition I have often wondered why it was necessary for you to have a *leader*."

It was on August 25 that, home again at Trowbridge, he wrote:

"Dear Miss Charter,—Be favourable to me and be very, very much disposed to acquit me, or all I can write will not avail me, and yet indeed I have been and am much indisposed; nor do I know, in looking backward on my past years, that I have ever felt that Lowness, that Wearyness of Spirit, and that total Unfitness for the Duties or Pleasures of Friendship, than just at the period when my Friends might have conceived that I was best disposed to think favourably of the Things present, and to look cheerfully at the Fortune that seemed to smile upon me. I had long been engaged by my work—for so they term it—and anxious that Mr. Murray should not have to complain of Neglect on my part. I was kept some Weeks at this Work of Correction and I will confess to you, for we are Friends, that I was apprehendsive that he would have some cause to repent

PULTENEY STREET, BATH

(In the early part of the Nineteenth Century.)

him of the Liberality of his Dealing with me. I stayed in Town just long enough to receive a favourable Account of the first Sale of the Book from him and I returned to this Place with Satisfaction on that Head. A Friend from Town accompanied me who needed a Retreat and his State of Health demanded my Attention: then followed this contested Election and when I came to myself, if I may so express my feelings, I felt ill and exhausted and indeed in some Degree remain so.

"I wish I was with you my dear Miss Charter: a Walk by the Sea-sand or indeed on any quiet Earth would be great Comfort to me, who cannot boast of Fortitude and Firmness of Mind, as a Christian or even as a Philosopher—doubtless a much inferior though not an inconsistent Character—ought.

"I am pleased my dear Lady to receive these Tidings of your Family Connections which you are so good as to send me. Thank God, I am not insensible to the feelings of my Friends and I should be ashamed if I did not rejoice in all that so nearly concerns you. I will pass over all you write of my apparent Neglect and Ingratitude: taken in one Sense you have Reason, in another and considering the State of a weak Mind you have not: No, Dear, could I have been with you and had the Comfort of conversing with you, in that long Interval of my hurried, perplexing and in some Degree anxious State of Mind, you would not have thought me unmindful of your Kindness, indeed you would not; but you can scarcely Conceive the Reluctance with which I take up a Pen even to my dearest Friends and nearest Relatives. My Sister accuses me and justly judging by Time but not by Affection: and then my dear Miss Charter the Business of this World, so long deferred by me, demanded and that very urgently my Attention. The sad Employment of calling for Tithe and Rent, the Adjusting all the Business of a

Parish that is peculiarly the Rectors and the still worse Necessity of enforcing payments from refractory and dishonest people—for I am sure you will not believe me oppressive to the necessitous. All this is a Demand for Spirits which I have not at all Times ready for the Occasion; and here it is that I want the Friend to whom I might resort and talk or laugh away the Occurrences of the Day. I have about 200 persons who pay me or should pay, Rent, Tithe or what are called Modus and though Thank God you are out of the way of such Dealings, yet you can easily conceive how ill they are adapted to Minds of so flimsy a Texture as your Friend's.

"But Come! I will not teize you by a recital of such petty Concerns, only let me have the plea they make for me. Tis not Want of Time, for we have all so much Time as a Letter requires but it is the Mind's Leisure: many Hours I have had, when I could have sat down to write and what alas! should I have written? 'As good, perhaps you will tell me, as I write now';— Well, saucy Lady, I allow that but if I wait till I can write to you a good, sensible, clever kind of Letter, when do you think that can be? No! No! Dear if you will condescend to have my Letters you must take such things as these and in your Charity call them Letters and say to yourself—'The poor Man has been Agitated by his Apprehendsions about his Book, and then his Trowbridge Rabble who break Windows and then cry out for Justice and Wheat-bread and there is then his Money-business for which Nature and his Studies have unfitted him and so I must try and forgive his apparent Neglect and Ingratitude.' Thanks my Dear Miss Charter, now you reason kindly, and like yourself and do not think because I have been silent that therefore I have been unmindful. No indeed I have often been with you in Idea, and most sincerely wish I could in Reality.

"And did you feel Anxiety about my Tales? Kind Miss Charter! I scarcely know what parts are Favourites with me, because an Author generally has Motives which his Readers have not: the most elaborate and favourable Criticism at present is that of the Edinborough Magazine, "Blackwoods": it is indeed most friendly but whose I know not: it mentions the Tale of "Ellen" and of C. a compounded Kind of Relation, founded on Revenge, A Story of a Farmer Ellis. Some Friends of mine at Hampstead, Mrs. Hoare, Wife of Mr. Hoare the Banker, a Lady of excellent Judgment if I may be allowed to say so, likes the Story of the Brothers, called Smugglers and Poachers. A Lady much younger indeed prefers the too-long Story of Lucy and Jane and the first Ghost-Story of Lady Barbara is the favourite of certain Friends in Town. I have now told you Dear almost all I know: my own Partiality is with the Relation of the Brothers, Richard's Education if I may so call it, but pray judge for yourself. I ought to apologise for not sending any Copies to my Friends, but I could not; having sold all to Mr. Murray, I could not in justice claim any Copies and only stipulated for one to the Duchess of Rutland and to Lord Holland, Mr. Scott and Mr. Rogers who had all sent their books to me: now will you not be displeased? I assure you this has given me pain and at one Time I had a great Mind to order 40 or 50 Copies for my Friends secretly, but the Expense and not knowing even then where to stop deterred me: I did not send any to my Sister, Brother, or Sons and so I trust my Friends will pardon me and that is as much as I can do to myself. I believe a Copy was sent to Lord Byron but not by me, yet Mr. Murray sends me all his Works and I have rec'd Don Juan: a singularly careless, immoral Work! whether immortal I cannot say.

"Accept my sincere Congratulation on the late Event in your Family. Indeed I rejoice in all that

promotes your Happiness or Comfort ! *pray believe me*, you did when we were at Bath, do now. I do wish to be at the Sea. I scarcely should have a Preference provided I had Favourites with me : Those Excursions on and near the Sea are very interesting, if one's Company be so. They so dwell in the Memory, on the Heart I should say ; some feel the pleasure in Retrospection. You did not intend to write a long Letter you say, nor did you. It is too short, but why Dear speak of *Mortification ?* If I thought you in Earnest you would distress me. When shall we laugh in Milsom Street or in any Street of Bath again ? do you still recollect the Day and the Lady of whom I asked the Question respecting you ? Let us look cheerfully if we can. I was scarcely in good Spirits when I began to write, but talking with you makes me better, at least more comfortable, for I am but too much disposed to be gloomy. We have a Crowd assembled in our Market Place Tonight. Mr. Astley is come to eat Venison and give away Beer and the People drew his Carriage and prostrate themselves to their Temporary Idol. So would others or the same to their Idol's Rival. One's Mind is sick with the tumultous assemblies of unthinking Men. Women I should say, if I can call these unsexed Creatures in our Streets, Women ! No ! it cannot be ; I will not think some Beings whom I love and esteem are of the same Nature. Women ! it cannot be. Farewell my dear Friend ! I feel a little tingling in my Cheeks when I am about to say—' Write again ' and especially when I add let it be soon. Well Dear I know how unreasonable I am : there, do not chide me any more : impute a great deal to bad Spirits and much Employment. Be yourself, that is be very good and forgive your affectionate Friend, GEO. CRABBE.

" P.S.—I am confined for some Time by the State of my Son's Wife : Anne we suppose is in her *last month* and it is her first Trial of the Kind after several Dis-

appointments. I hope to tell you next month, all is well. Think of us, will you ? "

* * *

" This contested election " was caused by the resignation of Paul Methuen. John Benett stood again as Whig candidate, and the Tory was J. D. Astley. Crabbe again supported Benett, who though finally successful was apparently not appreciated in the Trowbridge part of Wiltshire, the Rector's espousal of his cause being anything but popular. Indeed, as we learn from this letter, Crabbe had his windows broken by way of emphasising his parishioners' divergence of political views. To this election belongs the story, told by his son, of the old man's unfailing courage. He quietly disregarded opposition where he felt the course which he was following to be the right one, and

" During the violence of that contested election, while the few friends of Mr. Benett were almost in despair of their lives, he was twice assailed by a mob of his parishioners, with hisses and the most virulent abuse. He replied to their formidable menaces by ' rating them roundly ' ; and though he was induced to retire by the advice of some friends, who hastened to his succour, yet this made no change in his vote, habits or conduct. He continued to support Mr. Benett ; he walked in the streets always alone, and just as frequently as before ; and spoke as fearlessly. Mr. Canon Bowles, who was near him on this occasion, says, in a letter to the present writer,—' A riotous, tumultuous and most appalling mob, at the time of election, besieged his house, when a chaise was at the door, to prevent his going to the poll and giving his vote in favour of my most worthy friend, John Benett of Pyt House, the present member for the county. The mob threatened to destroy the

chaise, and tear him to pieces, if he attempted to set out. In the face of the furious assemblage, he came out calmly, told them they might kill him if they chose, but, whilst alive, nothing should prevent his giving a vote at the election, according to his promise and principles, and set off, undisturbed and unhurt, to vote for Mr. Benett."

"These unsexed creatures in our streets" has a curiously modern ring—it might be said of some of those who have recently been engaged in repeated acts that repeatedly postpone further the end for which they profess to be working.

* * *

It may well be that Crabbe showed something rather of *naïveté* than of tact when in telling his correspondent of his inability to meet her he so often described how he had been with other friends. It would not be unnatural if she felt at times a little annoyed at his protestations of affection being seemingly so little supported by genuine efforts to effect those meetings for which he professed so strong a desire.

The end of October had come when he wrote again—and again wrote apologetically:

"My dear Miss Charter,—Your very Mildness is severe: I should not much heed harsh Words but your kind Forgiveness is Reproof that affects me: Yet do believe me that these long Intervals are not voluntary but I really feel Lassitude and Indisposition; And do dear Lady recollect that at Sixty five a Man may—for that I am very sure of—feel a lively Interest for his Friends and dearly love to hear from them, when he finds a Repugnance in himself to sit down and describe his own Sensations. Accept my best Thanks. I am

not insensible to your Goodness nor unmindful of the Honour as well as Pleasure that your Friendship confers on me. Then too my dear Lady you will remember my Engagements, partly with the public, partly with those Friends who indulge me by an Admission into their Society. I am lately returned from Cromer in Norfolk the Residence of my Friend Mr. Hoare for some few Weeks in the year. In my Return I past through Norwich where resides Mrs. Opie who kindly expects me when I am in that neighbourhood: from Norwich I went to Newmarket, in the first October Meeting (which I had not previously considered) and the Consequence was that at 12 oclock at Night I found myself in the Street without a Prospect of a Bed or even a Room to sleep. I sought the Rutland Arms, the principal Inn and was assured by the Waiter that there was not a vacant Bed in the House or the Town. I sought then the Widow—Mistress of the House—and by a little art and management that is, by making use of the name of the Duke of Rutland, who was then at his Seat at Cheveley adjoining Newmarket, I obtained first an Hearing and afterwards a Bed: To give me Credit—for I almost doubted whether I obtained full Belief—the Duke was kind enough to call on me next Day and then of Course I was a great Man with both the Lady of the Inn and every Waiter in her Dominion: I stayed a few Days with his Grace and then returned to my Parsonage where I found my Daughter and her little One in pretty good Health and preparing to leave me for a Visit to another Grandpapa in Suffolk.

"I attend to all the Accounts you give me and am always glad of all Intelligence which I think gives you pleasure. But are you not my dear Miss Charter, are you not, rather prone to be low, to feel too intensely? There is sometimes a Seriousness I had almost written a Solemnity in your Expressions; Now I know and love the Goodness of your Heart but I want Goodness to be

Cheerfulness. Tell me I am in Error and I will give you Credit, for I dearly love my Friends—The few which it has pleased God to give me—should be not only substantially happy but, if I may so write, externally cheerful. Virtue and Benignity, that are Blessings to all who move in the Sphere of their Attraction, should be also Blessings in themselves and give to the Heart and even to the Countenance that Joy which nothing besides can long and permanently afford. Now do not be displeased with me, since it is your Comfort and Happiness that I am anxious to promote and alas! how little can I do it, but I wish nevertheless. I do wish you could come to Bath indeed I do very much. Taunton is such a tremendously long Journey; Not so long as Cromer it may be said, True but to go to Cromer, We take London and London is the Seat of Business and in the Way, are Engagements, some of which Duty enters into and some Interest: Let all this be as it may, I should be highly gratified by such Days as I have had and such as Fortune yet may indulge me with. Know you Anything of a Family of *Brice* somewhere in the neighbourhood of Bridgewater. A young Lady of our Acquaintance here has been staying with them and I once met them at Sidmouth. Mr. Brice is a Clergyman and has two Daughters and this indeed is almost all I know of them—but I judged it was likely that you might and yet Bridgewater and Taunton must be at no inconsiderable Distance.

"I hear tollerable Accounts of my Book, and anxiously hope that Mr. Murray may not be a Looser by his Liberality:[1] that indeed would mortify me much more than any Severity of the Critics who, however, have been as graciously disposed towards me as I could expect. The Edinborough more particularly who have praised me into some Reputation for

[1] John Murray had paid Crabbe the sum of £3000 for the rights to his poetical works. See *ante*, p. 223.

writing Lyrical verses, that is to say, Songs, a Talent with which I did not previously flatter myself that I was in Possession of, and it is marvelous how much even acute Readers are led and influenced by these periodical Critics who dictate to us all more than perhaps any of us are willing to allow. May I beg to be remembered to your Sister ? I mean will you present my Respects if I do beg, and you must give me full Credit when I tell you how much I am interested for Lady Malet. . . . I am happy that I once saw her. She does Honour . . . known she would be the more esteemed and admired.

" I must now my dear Miss Charter take an hasty Leave of you. I heartily wish I could see you and that we could talk of—I do not know what, nor is it material—It is not so much what Friends converse about as it is whether they are really in Friendship—With that, every Trifling Event, every Common-place Sentiment is interesting or entertaining and without it, how dull and unengaging the most brilliant Sallies of Wit and the most lively Anecdotes that Curiosity can pick up.

" Poetry does pretty well in these Times, but not Poets. I hear that Mr. Anacreon Moore is obliged to go abroad on Acct. of the decision which calls on him for £6000, a Debt contracted without a Fault on his part and almost without a Possibility of Avoiding it. Lord Byron is also Self-banished. Bowles and I are priests struggling with the Clamour and Infidelity of the Times. Campbell is poor with a Family and Scott alone is said to be wealthy. Well ! I do not grieve nor do I hope my Brethren, these are better Days than those of greater Men. I have my Shilling for the poor and None of us is without Bread for himself. Farewell dear Miss Charter. Believe me truly and affectionately yours,"

" Poetry does pretty well in these times "—better probably in the monetary way than at any other, yet it is to be feared that Crabbe would have done very much

less well than he did had he depended upon his literature only, though it must of course be recognised that it was to his gifts as poet that he owed his position in the Church.

* * *

The reference to his poetry may serve to introduce a letter which Crabbe wrote on November 11, 1819, to J. Hatchard, of Piccadilly, who had acted as his publisher ; a letter which is interesting as showing that the new arrangement with Murray had not been in consequence of, or led to, any quarrel with Hatchard, and a pleasant refutation of the popular fallacy that all authors and all publishers are quarrelsome creatures in their inter-relations.

"Dear Sir,

"I take it as an act of kindness your sending to me that Number of the Christian Observer in which my late Book has been reviewed : the Writer is probably unknown, personally, to me but he appears to be one whom any Man might desire to know and I take all his Remarks as those of an informed, candid and serious Mind, more serious perhaps than a Critique on Verses of any Description call for : Little I am afraid can be effected by the Muse of most moral and even seraphic Endowments : the Urania of Milton and the—I know not what to call her—of Young included : Creating in the Reader a general sobriety and some Elevation of Mind is all I think that can be expected or that will be found to arise from the perusal of the more serious and sublime poetry, but even if I thought more might be done, a Writer must consider whether he be capable of doing it. I endeavour to take up the Burden that fits my Shoulders and I fear that under one of more weighty and precious Kind, I should stumble and fall.

"I am not disposed to question the Sentiment of the

Writer of that Article: we are probably too much engaged, both, to have leisure for comparing the manner— Differences of Opinion and Differences very great I presume there are not. Matters of Fact ask less Time, and this Gentleman will pardon me, I hope, when I assure him that Smugglers pray and read their Bible: I do not mean by Smugglers, noctur[n]al Ruffians, who if they did not smuggle would rob, even in their Sense of the Word, but Men and *Women* engaged in the Buying and selling Goods which have not paid the legal Duties. These people look upon this as half of [an] adventurous but not criminal, not immoral Nature. I knew at one period of my Life two Villages, and I am convinced, nay I am *almost* certain, that *if* I except the Minister and 2 or 3 of the more opulent Farmers' Wives, there was not an Inhabitant in either who did not deal in this Trade, and this Gentleman will not surely judge so hardly as to suppose, the instructed people of two populous Villages to be without piety or prayer. In truth, they are taught that illicit traffic is hazardous but not forbidden by their Religion: In some Cases when evil Habits or want of Success Drive the Smuggler into desperate measures as Contention with the Revenue Officers or Invasion of the Property of Individuals, then indeed the Bible must be thrown aside and the prayer omitted. When my Smuggler turned poacher he probably used to read, to pray, and as far as he could, to think—but I do not mean to dispute the Sentiment as a general one.—

"What you observe of our Connection and its Termination is what might be expected from you, I am happy to reflect upon the past because I find all was correct and fair: we part not in Complaint, in Resentment, in Suspicion. Duty to my family, an increasing family, and that common and natural Degree of Gain, led me to expect a liberal offer but it certainly abates not my good opinion or takes in any Degree from my

Regard. With respect to Mr. Murray, I must act justly, and as I have invested him with all my Right to and Claim on the Works which at different Periods you published as mine, be so good as to consider that Gentleman as standing in my place with *Respect to these Works* and whatever his Wishes and requests are they have my full Consent and Concurrance.

" I shall always be glad of an Opportunity of hearing of or from you. I return you my sincere thanks for the trouble you have taken and with the best Wishes for your Health and Comfort and of Mrs. Hatchard and your family, I remain, My dear Sir, Yours very truly,

" GEO. CRABBE."

* * *

Once more election business took the poet away from Wiltshire, and once more it hindered a meeting between him and his " dear Miss Charter," for at home at Trowbridge again he wrote on December 14 :

" It grieves me, my dear Miss Charter, indeed it does, that I should thus be compelled by unavoidable Circumstances to loose the only Opportunity of meeting you which has occurred for so long a Period.

" I earnestly hope to have better Fortune, and as the Year advances I will try for it and try heartily too. At the Time when you were at Cheltenham and some Days before I was many Miles distant attending to the unpleasant Business of an Election ; a Borough Election, and one of the most noisy and riotous Kind. When you returned home by Bath, I also was thinking of return but was detained two Days longer, not at Cambridge where I first went, but in Town and where my Affairs, such as they are, called me. Of this my dear Miss Charter you may be fully assured, that my Journey was compulsatory, at least I was Called by every Sense of Gratitude and good feeling, and the Duke of Rutland

would have had just Cause for upbraiding a Man deeply indebted to him if I had not put myself a little out of the Way and given up a few Comforts and even the Pleasure of meeting a Friend dear to me, to be of use to one of his. I had the Mortification of going from London to Chelmsford, about 50 Miles I believe, on the Coach-box in a very dreadful Night and to beg a Bed after much Delay about Four in the Morning, but I arrived in Cambridge in Time for the Business that called me, and the Cold, etc., that my unusual Mode of Travelling procured me is going comfortably Away. I found my young people well and preparing to quit my Parsonage for some Months I am afraid, but I have a Niece with me and another Son will Come so that I have not Solitude to apprehend.

"I should have written, but I was at a Loss not receiving your directing Letter and my Journey was so sudden as to leave me no Time for Deliberation.

"And would my Illness my dear Lady, suppose I really had been ill, have been any more than the Illness of any other Fellow Being whom you . . . Certainly it gives Pleasure . . . Beings interested in your Welfare and Happiness and as I have no Doubts on my own part, I ought to have none on yours and beside it would give me pain to call in Question a Friendship of this Standing.

"My Absence has heaped Business upon me and that too Business which I neither love nor am fit to undertake; Business which they only transact who Well understand it and that I will not do, just at the End of a Life, having been ignorant or inattentive to it all the rest of my Days and well it is for such Minds that we have not much of it to trouble us and yet I know some of my Brethren very keen and clever at this kind of Employment and who can calculate their Interest and bargain as well as Stewards and Solicitors: I would One could buy a little of this saving Knowledge to

answer a temporary Purpose, but that is one of the vain Wishes we are so disposed to give Way to. If I live thro' the Summer, I should like to think of Seaports and Walks where I may loose myself and forget where I am and what I am doing. Do you ever Dream in that Way ? I believe not. You are so reasonable a Creature and yet you do feel too, but I want to be more with you, for one cannot read one's Friends at such monstrous Distance.

" This is only to be received as an Apology and so you must read it and write to me as if I were one of the best Creatures in the World as I believe you are. Remember me my dear Friend to your Sister and to whomsoever I am known and especially known to be yours very . . ."

In January, 1820, Maria, the younger daughter of his friend Everett, of Salisbury, died, and a stone to her memory was erected in the garden of the house on Milford Hill, where it still remains. George Crabbe wrote for it the appropriate " lapidary " verse :

" Fair, kind, and good, the coldest Heart would grieve
When Love such loss, and Death such prize receive.
Here will they mourn to whom thy worth was known,
And with a Mother's sorrows blend their own :
Here Grief will come, where she so often came,
And read with fond regret Maria's name ;
Will on her beauty, on her virtues dwell—
The early promise and the sad farewell,
Till Hope revived shall look beyond the tomb
And point to scenes where Grief can never come."

* * *

Though the preceding was but an " apology " for a letter, there appears to have been a goodly gap between it and the next, and again Crabbe had to be apologetic over a missed meeting. In the interval he had twice written to Mrs. Leadbeater (February 17, 1820) touching

on a theme which he had discussed with Elizabeth Charter :

" I am a creature of this world, and mix too much with its people to be one of you ; and yet I love you too, and am not so far a disciple of the relaxed philosophy of the great world as not to covet the enjoyments of simplicity, domestic affection, moral refinement and unaffected simplicity. . . . Money and versification have not of late that utter dissociation and repugnancy that they had of old. Scott is wealthy. Lord Byron might be. Moore is indigent only by accident. Rogers is rich and bountiful. The Lake Poets, if they have not money, say they want none, and I, who do not say so, have as much as does me good."

In thus summing up his contemporary poets Crabbe illustrates how little an older generation may have the capacity for recognising the young gods of the new—Keats, Shelley, and Leigh Hunt[1] are ignored. Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Southey were presumably in his mind as " the Lake Poets." On April 15 he wrote again to the same correspondent, saying : " Is it not a proof that the world is growing better when it permits poets to grow rich ? " and besides the poets to whom he had already referred mentions Campbell and Montgomery—being still seemingly unaware of the existence—or of the significance—of Shelley and Keats.

At the beginning of April, 1820, Crabbe was in London for a few days—primarily as we learn from the next letter—to meet Sir Walter Scott. In his diary occurs the item among his expenses : " Dinner and Subscription at Thatched House £2. 16. 6." This is interesting because it suggests that there may have been a club at

[1] See *ante*, p. 241.

the Thatched House many years before the Thatched House Club was formally established. Probably, however, the reference is to his subscription to the Literary Society, for in his letter to Miss Waldron of a year earlier, referred in the preceding chapter, he had said: "I am going to-day to dine at the Thatched House, being elected a member of the Literary Society."

It was on April 7, 1820, that Crabbe wrote next to Elizabeth Charter, she being then on a visit to London, at 27 Welbeck Street, Cavendish Square. On that date in his diary the whole space is filled with the entry: "Miss Charter, 27 Welbeck Street, Cavendish Sq." with the addition in cipher "answerd."

"My dear Madam,—How am I to reply and beg for Clemency when you tell me what I deserve, and if I deserve ever so much remember how I am punished: for just as you were going to enter London, I was preparing to leave it: One Consolation indeed remains though it be a small one: had I remained it could but have been for two Days longer and in that space the probability of seeing you was not great and the Chance of a Walk much less.

"I am glad nevertheless that you are in Town and I sincerely hope that you will have much Pleasure and go where you will be best pleased: it would have been what One would have delighted in, could it have been so but alas these fortunate Contingencies so seldom Occur. I went to Town for 8 Days, almost my sole Business being to meet Mr. — or as we now write Sir Walter Scott. I had heard so much of him and so accurately that He was the very Man whom I expected to see, plain, very friendly and very agreeable: I am almost induced to accept the Cordial Invitation I have to Edinborough, but I must leave this at present, till my Son and his Wife return and give me freedom to go

whither I am disposed. Now if John be punctual and relieves me within a Month as He purposes; within 5 or 6 Weeks I may expect to see Town again and that for a much longer Time and in that case I trust No. 27 Welbeck Street will have retained you, at least I shall try, but take Notice, I shall not be contented with any Exchange or a Substitute whether a Northumbrian or more Southern Lady and be she as lovely as Imagination can paint her. I envy the Gentleman who accompanied you so far on your Journey.

"I am sorry to agree with you respecting the Winter: we have found it very severe and our Poor have suffered much without breaking out into any Outrage or even much Threatening and Tumult, but the Disturbances in the North are indeed serious and alarming. I am sorry that your Neighbourhood has been so much Affected and your more immediate Connections have not escaped. I have been indisposed and a pain acute and almost electrical has made me nervous, for I have a perpetual Dread of a Stroke that gives me no Warning: it comes of itself but is also excited by a silk Handkerchief or any soft Cloth applied to that part of the Face and the Shock is so much like that of the Electrical Phial that if Pain were the Consequence of the Electrical Stroke, it would be the same Thing, my Pain being equally sudden and equally momentary in its passing Away. I was afraid of that horrible Disorder the Tic douloureux, but I am assured that does not affect the lower part of the face where my Pain arises and so far I am safe. I am, when in Town, in a Part probably unknown to you but very conveniently within 2 Minutes Walk of Mr. Murray and within 3 or 4 of another Friend. I take Lodging at 18 Brewers Street, Golden Square. The good people and I suit each other and they have 4 little pretty Girls for me to play with when I am childish, which Occurs very frequently.

"And it made your Heart ache to be so near Wilbury

and not to be an Inhabitant—ah ! dear Lady is your Heart given to aching ? I think mine approaches that curious Sensation sometimes, but I resist and so must you my dear Friend, for what between the Sufferings we witness and those we experience our Hearts are tried and if they do not absolutely break, they feel miserably. We have a vast Number of heart-searching Cases among us and so I conclude all have who do not habitually resist them and get the Heart so hard that there is henceforth, no Danger of its breaking.

" Now, you know the Worse I am, the better you should be that we may have a proper Quantity of this kind of Goodness between us : it is nothing more than Reason you will allow, for me to say ! ' Write again and tell me how you arrived and how you find yourself disposed to see and be seen and how your lively friend is, with all that should be told to a *good Correspondent*, who knows how to value your Letters, even when he does not know how to answer them.' And the post I am afraid is going out, yet I said as soon as I recd. your Letter, This I am determined to be thankful for, for we have sometimes Grace enough to be sensible of our own Unworthiness and then we become grateful to our Friends for their unmerited Kindnesses.

" Adieu dear Miss Charter. Remember me to your Sister who I do think is an admirable good Kind of Being and believe me to be if you can your very grateful friend. . . ."

During this year 1820 an interesting detail which has escaped Crabbe's biographers is the fact that the " Pocket Magazine " had each month a beautiful little engraving illustrating some passage in his poems.

The Rev. Richard Warner, Vicar of St. James's Church, Bath

(From a miniature in the collection of A. M. Broadley.)

CHAPTER XI

LETTERS, 1821–25

"I suffered much, but found at length
Composure in my wounded heart;
The mind attained its former strength
And bade the lingering hopes depart."
Storm and Calm.

IT is perhaps inevitable that a sentimental correspondence should tail off as do so many other expressions of human energy. The frequency and regularity with which Crabbe wrote to Elizabeth Charter when the friendship was new and fraught with those possibilities to which the poet looked forward for lessening the loneliness of his Trowbridge parsonage was little likely to be maintained long after the intercourse had fallen into the pleasant but jog-trot measure of friendship without the touch of romance, without the prospect of being changed into any nearer relationship. We have seen the intervals between the letters growing in length, and there is nothing to indicate that the intervals in the correspondence as it has reached us might be in consequence of missing letters. The frequent apologies for delay suggest otherwise. We all know the zeal with which a correspondence may be begun, and the way in which things that are all in the day's work gradually interfere with its continuance, until the regular correspondence becomes intermittent, and the intermittence merges into the rare, and that

at length into silence ; and that be it said without any necessary lessening of the feeling of friendship. Propinquity has been described as the most usual determining factor in love ; despite the proverbial saying which declares that absence makes the heart grow fonder, it may be believed that continual absence is not as a rule conducive to the continued expression of that fondness.

Crabbe had long since realised that Elizabeth Charter was not to be the not impossible she whom he dreamed of as ruling over his parsonage, he had perhaps long since also realised that he was not to find a second mate, before the correspondence tailed off into the occasional communications which mark its later years. It was not, as he said in the next letter—after a silence of a year and a quarter—any lessening of affection that made him cease writing, but claims upon his time, and he even contemplated retirement that he might devote himself to conversing by letter with his friends ! He writes from Trowbridge on July 16, 1821 :

" My dear Miss Charter,—Neither Idleness nor Business, neither the Claims of my Friends nor the Employments of the Study, have engaged me so much as to prevent my Attention where Duty and Affection call for it ; but I have ceased to write and accumulated Debt upon Debt, only by having perpetual Demands upon me which I cannot satisfy. I am thus doubly distressed, for I grow more indisposed for Writing and indeed for Occupation of any Kind and unfortunately the Claims upon my Time increase and multiply.

" A Lady who joins with you, my dear Madam, in your Accusation tells me in her Letter, that I shall permit myself to be worn out and my Neglect will punish itself.

Alas! it is not neglect: I feel severely that I must appear ungrateful and I oftentimes resolve to take myself entirely from the Concerns of an office now become painfully engrossing and by going to some place where I am utterly a Stranger, there to sit down and converse—at least in this Way—with the Friends whom I do not cease to love though I appear to neglect them. And then too my Health refuses to permit the necessary Confinement, my Face is yet at Times painful and every kind of Exertion soon wearies me. I have often thought how kind and good you are to me, and I should love to meet you in some quiet place upon the Coast and there receive your Forgiveness. I could give you much more by Way of Apology, and tell you what passes in my Family, or rather in my Sons'; I could dwell upon our Hopes and Apprehendsions, but as I should end by saying that we are now once more in an hopeful way, after many & trying Disappointments I need not be more particular, yet I sometimes think that both my Son and I have our secret Fears which we do not love to communicate, and I look at his pretty and unapprehendsive Wife with Sensations which I should be sorry if she could perceive: Her Mother is with her and we look forward, at least with outward good Spirits, to the Months of September and October as we have done repeatedly in other years.

"And so my dear Miss Charter with these Kind of feelings, for myself and for others, with more Business than I can transact and a Correspondence which I should be happy if I could preserve, with growing Infirmity, but with good Hope, I work my way, feeling I confess a little Shame, that I am the Party who have to apologize and to ask forgiveness.

"We are employed in our several Ways preparing for the Coronation-day: in Collecting Money, in planning Modes of rejoicing, in ordering Processions and in Writing a Sermon, this latter falls to me exclusively and

I have made my Head ache previous to the rendering of that Service for my Congregation.

"No! my dear Lady, do not entirely discard me. I am not worth keeping as a Friend and yet I should feel unpleasantly, unhappily, if I knew that you had so rejected me, with all my Faults, great as they are, and I am far from thinking lightly of them: but I sometimes cannot write and I put it off as a Labour beyond my powers to accomplish and say—This adds to my Debt and to my Fault and yet I cannot help it.

"Heaven bless you my dear Lady, remember me to Miss Charter. Be assured that I write the very Truth. I wish I could fly as well as the Dove and I would be with you, 'by the Broad Sea and wandering along the Shores.' Happy be your Walks, thus prays Dear Miss Charter, your Friend, . . ."

* * *

An unduly long gap was again to follow that letter. In the interval during the late summer of 1822 George Crabbe paid his memorable visit to Scotland—a visit of which it is true he has but little, and after a long interval, to tell his dear Miss Charter. A letter to Crabbe from Bowles glances at this visit in the following passage: "Your neighbour Long, of Roode Ashton, inform'd me a few days ago that you were in Scotland, where I hope this will find you. But what can an humble Parson of an English Parish send worthy to be received by George Crabbe at Sir Walter Scot's [*sic*] in a Land of Philosophers, poets, Criticks, political economists, etc."

One pleasant letter (August 9, 1822) we have written by the poet to his son John during this visit—a letter which has not much that is descriptive of his stay in Scotland, but is interesting rather as showing how his

thoughts centred in his home. It is headed: "Sir Walter Scott, Castle Street, Edinburgh."

"My Dear John,—Do pray consider my Distance and let me hear from you once at least before I leave Edinburgh. There is a Letter for me on the Road I will conclude and hope for it every day till it arrives.

"I am very happy and very well—a pain now and then excepted—at Sir Walter's who is more engaged than any Man in England at this Time, but who does all he can to make me comfortable and in this He is joined by his whole family.

"Nor that only, for here are friends: Here is your Godmama Mrs. Fletcher, the Miss Dewson of old and her Husband and Daughters. Here is Mr. Mackenzie—with Surprise I heard it—the Author of the 'Man of Feeling' and indeed he is so called. Here is Mr. Jeffery to whom I always count myself obliged—Here is Mr. Lockart, Sir Walter's Son in Law, and his pleasant wife —Here is a Mr. Murray with whom I dined To-day and lastly, no not lastly for there are many more, but here is Mr. Blackwood the Editor of the Magazine which goes under his Name and who this Morning—in modo Mr. Murray of London—very kindly pressed me to accept a Volume and a very pleasing Volume of Miscellanies which I will take with me if I live to reach Trowbridge again.

"All is, as you may suppose Bustle and a continual Accession of Strangers. The Highland Chieftain and his Officers and followers make a respectable but singular Appearance. We had quite a Day of it yesterday, and Wine and Music and more than I can or perhaps ought to tell you in a Letter. But we shall meet I hope and you will hear my Stories if I do not forget or lose all before I see you: I wish George was with you that I might write to both at once. How is Anne and Caroline? My Love to them and how is Anne's Health? Do consider where I am.

" I find Time in all this Confusion to walk and even to rhyme and have a few Verses on the Occasion, which are not much amiss. I daresay Mr. Blackwood would give me thanks for them, and I do not know but I may give them to him, if I can do it with perfect Concealment, but I will consult Sir Walter.

" Hollis is quite a Gentleman. He has found a Friend in Sir Walter's Attendant after his own Heart. Both good quiet fellows, both Bachelors of a certain Age. Both curious inquisitive obedient, orderly Men, there is quite a Friendship. I did not know that He was *in* the House till to-day. Lady Scott, who by the Way is a favourite with me, gave her orders gently and Hollis has a good Berth of it. No Wonder the Man is pleased.

" It is late but I shall be engaged in the morning and you will probably like to know how I progress etc. We expect the King over about Tuesday—My Regards to all as usual.

" No Quarries here, but many Mountains, no Pits nor Fossils but granite in Abundance and the Views of the City very fine indeed. Nothing near London equals it. Of Business of Course I can know nothing, if difficulty arises you will consult Mr. Timbrel, but I wish you would consider it as your own and act for me on that footing, it would ease me much and I shall rejoice in your Assistance, for Instance, if a Tenant offers for the Garden [?] Vine's etc.

" I wonder whether Mr. T. Clark knows that he has 2 years Rent to pay—I should like to earn a little Money during this Excursion and will if possible make a little Volume, like a thin one of the Tales of the Hall. I wonder what Murray would say. I know that Constable here would like to hear of it, but I will not do unhandsomely by my friend in Albemarle Street.—

" I hope you and Mr. —— go on to your Mind. Let him draw as he likes, there is yet Money in the Bank :

Corn in Egypt as [?] says. By the way I told him to pay for me £16. as he has it and is going to receive another Dividend, I suppose he has no Objection, yet I would not be quite sure. My Friend loves to have in Hand, but I shall not always forget that the Money is really and truly mine. When I do not want it, let him keep it but if I do, I shall not sacrifice to politeness. However I may judge wrong. How is George ?—I hear from Hampstead and cannot help speaking of my kind friend Mr. Hoare, who for fear I should want, sent me an order to call upon Sir W. Forbes' Bank for *any Sum* I pleased. I do not please but I feel his kindness.—I am my dear Son, With much affection etc.,

"G. Crabbe."

The final words afford a pleasant testimony to the sincerity of the friendship between the Hoares and Crabbe.

* * *

Apart from this Scottish excursion so unwontedly far afield, details of which are given in his biography, but which do not more nearly concern this particular romance, Crabbe seems to have been mainly occupied with those parish ties which he was finding more irksome, and also it would seem suffering from that tic-douloureux which we generally know in these days as neuralgia. Such is the impression which we get from a letter written from Trowbridge to the sculptor, Francis Chantry, at the end of the year in reply to one of a month earlier. Chantry wrote (from Belgrave Place on November 7) :

"My dear Sir,—I am grieved to hear of y^{r} indispo^{n} and I wish you as well rid of it as I am of the illness which drove me into Wales. The Winter is not the most auspicious season for modelling but the head of a poet will make December ful as July—I can see no obstacle

at present to prevent me making the Bust. I hope you will come with y^r^ usual look and health and good humour—I am obliged to ask the assistance of nature in this for I always find art has enough to do to express what is before it. Believe me my dear friend Sincerely yours " (FRANCIS CHANTRY).

" The REVD. GEO. CRABBE.

" On writing your name an odd thought has struck me many a letter you must write weekly to friends who admire and esteem you and the two superfluous letters at the end of y^r^ name have been so often repeated as would have enabled you to compose a poem as long and enduring as y^r^ ' Borough '—Think my dear friend what a noble work we have lost by so many Be's."

Crabbe's reply to this, dated Trowbridge, December 15, is in the Manuscript Department of the British Museum, and runs as follows :

" MY DEAR SIR,—It is but little time since I wrote to you asking whether you would receive me if I came to town, to which you replied, as accustomed, very obligingly, and now I am under the necessity of writing to crave your excuse and to acknowledge that pain and fever will not permit me to contend with cold and a journey. I had hope of reaching Belvoir Castle and of being in town for some days, but man's purposes are liable to Failtures from many causes, and that which confines me to my Parsonage is one of the most commanding as [*sic*] will be obeyed. I hope you escape both kinds of infirmity, Pain and sickness, and that we shall meet in some happy period far from such unwelcome visitations. Mrs. Chauntry [*sic*] I hope is quite well, and that this cold that whitens every shrub in my garden walk finds you in good health, able to bear it and, with some comfortable supporters, to enjoy it also.

" I am under trial of a remedy for my disorder which

appears to have some good in it. It is a preparation of steel: Steel applied in one way will no doubt cure any pain, and I am not without hope, that it will be efficacious when taken in my way. In the meantime I keep up my spirits and one way of doing that is by anticipating the pleasure of meeting with my friends. I am, my dear Sir, With respects and good wishes to you and Mrs. Chantry, Your obliged and obed[t]

" George Crabbe.

" I cannot account for the vanity of that one of my ancestors who first (being dissatisfied with the four letters which composed the name of ' Crab ' the sour Fruit or ' Crab ' the crusty fish) added his ' be ' by way of disguise. Alas ! he gained nothing worth his trouble, but he has brought upon me his descendant after I know not how many generations, a question beyond my abilities to answer ! "—

* * *

A year and a half was to elapse before Crabbe wrote again to Elizabeth Charter, and again (January 27, 1823) it was with self-exculpatory words that he was impelled to begin—as though conscious that he might have written oftener had his sentiments been as warm as his words.

" To be sure, my dear Friend, if the Account between us be reckoned, Letter by Letter, Line by Line, it might possibly—and yet I am not sure—exhibit a Ballance against me ; but to take it up within the last 10 or 12 Months and where I pray you my dear Lady am I found so deficient ? Here is a pretty fair Statement. You go to Paris and being wearied with the Exhibitions of a splendid Capital you escape for Ease and Comfort to the Shades, Vallies and Mountains of the ever delightful Switzerland and then down the Rhine with Digressions to Frankfort etc., you find your Way into England and

rest in the Province of the Belgie is it not ? the fruitful and happy Soil of Somerset and Devon. In the mean Time, I your poor Infirm Friend and accused Correspondent, take my Way to Town, labouring under the perpetual Attacks of a painful Tic douloureux ! Tiqque ! they call it but it is an horrid electrical Tique, brief indeed but excruciatingly severe, and after some Delay in the great City I take my Place in a Mail-Coach for York, Newcastle, Carlisle and Edinborough and there am received into the Hospitality of Sir Walter Scott and his Family, at a period, when He, his Lady, with all his Family and Connections, are with the good People of the sober City, made almost drunken with the expected and soon after, the real Presence of their Sovereign. Here then I am stationary enjoying—insomuch as pain would permit—the Hospitality aforesaid, with all the Bustle, Pomp and Circumstance of the Time.

" From Scotland I returned by Way of Berwick and reached the House of a Sister in Suffolk about 2 Months after my Departure from Home and three before my Return to the quiet and solitary Room in which I reign Sovereign and where I am now giving this Account to my Friend in Taunton and I would ask her at what period I was to have written to her and where directed ?

" Now are ye not an unreasonable Sex my dear Miss Charter ? Be candid and call up all the Charitable and kind Spirit that I am sure dwells with you and then I have no Apprehendsion of Severity. Perhaps I ought to have set aside Pain and all Consideration of Self and written at an Early period before your Excursion ? Well ! If it be so then the more kind you, if you will permit the Humility of the Self-accusation in some Degree to attone for the Transgression, which never amounted to Forgetfulness, for that I allow is Sin against Friendship : Delay is all I can confess and I will trust to your gentle Spirit for my pardon ; remember dear

Lady if I did not love you, I should not Care whether you pardoned or not.

"Having mentioned something of the Past I would, if I could do it satisfactorily say something of the future: I have some Hope—if it please God that my Disorder allows me—of going to Town about May and have three or four small Poems—One a Tale related to me by a Mr. Galley Knight: [1] himself a Writer of Verses and One very Capable of doing Justice to his own Story, but he declined it and I have brought forth about 300 Lines: how to succeed I cannot tell: with this I have united some few other—I know not precisely what to call them—Tales too I suppose: One might be named the 'Deserted Wife' but Time enough for this Communication, which I might withhold, except that One's Friends are entitled to know what One is about—and this leads me to the Subject of your Poem, which I have not yet read, but mean to order immediately and I shall certainly do all you desire of me and which you have a right to Command.

"I can sympathise with a Young Author and especially if a Friend be interested in his Success. You are not to wonder at Mr. Murray's rejection; he is wearied with Offers and we cannot suppose a Publisher in all Cases or even in many to see Merit: He has likewise been disappointed of late and ruffled and no Wonder that he looks cautiously: but if I can do any good be assured that I will. . . . Have you heard of any . . . General Peachey's Family, and I am truly sorry to find that anything distressing has befallen it. The General most kindly wrote to me in Scotland but unfortunately I was gone from Edinb. before his Letter reached Sir Walter's: Can you give me the Address in Town? I beg you would believe me interested in all that relates to you and the Family,

[1] Henry Galley Knight (1786–1846), sometime member of Parliament for Aldborough and other places, was author of several volumes of verse, and of others on architectural subjects.

to every part of it I beg my best Respects and Wishes wheresoever it can be done with propriety. I wonder, whether were I to supplicate for a speedy Reply, you would not say! 'The Man has no Conscience, no Reflection, no Memory'—But I have Dear Lady, only I am concerned to know what has happened since we met and When shall we meet Again? Do you recollect a pleasant Morning—was it not a Morning in Bath? but I think I have asked the Question before, I suppose because the Thing dwells in the Memory. Adieu my dearest Friend treat me with affection. . . .

"P.S.—My Son informs me that He read of an Accident happening to the Nephew of the General, was it so?"

There is something a little ingenuous in the implication that on his travels, and during his stay in Scotland, the poet could not have had time to write to Miss Charter, for she could not be aware that he had found time to write to another of his "female friends." It was during his visit to London in 1822 that Crabbe met Sir Walter Scott—still unacknowledged as the author of the "Waverley" novels—and Scott "would not part with him until he had promised to visit him in Scotland the ensuing autumn." Unfortunately the time of the visit synchronised with that of King George the Fourth, so that instead of staying at Abbotsford and having much of personal intercourse with Scott he stayed with him in Edinburgh at a period when the time of the Wizard of the North was much taken up over the reception of the King. To the friend for whom he did find time he wrote:

"Whilst it is fresh in my memory, I should describe the day which I have just passed, but I do not believe

an accurate description to be possible. What avails it to say, for instance, that there met at the sumptuous dinner, in all the costume of the Highlanders, the great chief himself and officers of his company. This expresses not the singularity of appearance and manners—the peculiarities of men, all gentlemen, but remote from our society—leaders of clans—joyous company. Then we had Sir Walter Scott's national songs and ballads, exhibiting all the feelings of clanship. I thought it an honour that Glengarry even took notice of me, for there were those, and gentlemen, too, who considered themselves honoured by following in his train. There were, also, Lord Errol, and the Macleod, and the Frazer, and the Gordon, and the Ferguson; and I conversed at dinner with Lady Glengarry, and did almost believe myself a harper, or bard, rather—for harp I cannot strike—and Sir Walter was the life and soul of the whole. It was a splendid festivity, and I felt I know not how much younger.

"I went to the palace of Holyrood House, and was much interested;—the rooms, indeed did not affect me—the old tapestry was such as I had seen before, and I did not much care about the leather chairs, with three legs each, nor the furniture, except in one room—that where Queen Mary slept. The bed has a canopy very rich, but time-stained. We went into the little room where the Queen and Rizzio sat, when his murderers broke in and cut him down as he struggled to escape: they show certain stains on the floor; and I see no reason why you should not believe them made by his blood, if you can.

"Edinburgh is really a very interesting place,—to me very singular. How can I describe the view from the hill that overlooks the palace—the fine group of buildings which form the castle; the bridges, uniting the two towns; and the beautiful view of the Frith and its islands?

"But Sunday came, and the streets were forsaken; and silence reigned over the whole city. London has a diminished population on that day in her streets; but in Edinburgh it is a total stagnation—a quiet that is in itself devout.

"A long walk through divers streets, lanes, and alleys, up to the Old Town, makes me better acquainted with it; a lane of cobblers struck me particularly; and I could not but remark the civility and urbanity of the Scotch poor: they certainly exceed ours in politeness, arising, probably, from minds more generally cultivated.

"This day I dined with Mr. Mackenzie, the Man of Feeling as he is commonly called. He has not the manner you would expect from his works; but a rare sportsman, still enjoying the relation of a good day, though only the ghost of the pleasure remains.—What a discriminating and keen man is my friend; and I am disposed to think highly of his son-in-law, Mr. Lockhart—of his heart—his understanding will not be disputed by any one."

* * *

On March 27, 1823, he wrote to Miss Charter again:

"My dear Miss Charter,—You will I am sure forgive me, if you be convinced that I have been and in some degree continue to be so much indisposed that my Duties, now I am alone, are more than I know how to perform and indeed I have of late seriously thought of resigning a great part of them, but the Expectation of my Son's Return and Assistance, has hitherto induced me to go on. It is not the pain entirely but the nervous Fever which accompanies it, that renders me so unfit even for this, which would otherwise be my more pleasant Avocation, but no more Apology: I am in good Hands and as far as my Years and Infirmities permit, I look forward not uncheerfully.

"It was very kind in you to take so much trouble for me, and I heartily thank you for it: long Experience has

made me in a great measure acquainted with the Nature of my Disorder and the Methods of Relief : One of the most efficacious would be an Absence from these perpetual Calls upon my Attention, and this I hope for in no long time, though I dare not fix it just now. But let me attend to that Part of your Letter which I know is interesting to you. And now dear Lady what am I to say of ' Chinzica ' ? I could pass it over with a general Expression but how would that prove my Desire to do as you wish me, honestly, candidly. You puzzle me.

" If I thought the Poem all it should be, I should delight in giving it the praise it merited. If I thought it unworthy your Solicitude, I would ask you to think no more of it. I judge not so favourably nor condemn so decidedly. There is great Merit and the Opening is fine. There is Interest and Loftiness of Sentiment, but there are Faults. The Story is intricate, not in itself, but as it is told. The Rhymes in many Places careless. In some Instances the Ear is hurt. The Expressions ' I ween ' and ' eke ' occur, and in a poem not meant to represent antient Manners or obsolete Language this is wrong. The poem is very long and will be so felt, yet many parts are very fine and evidently originate in true poetic Conception. I should judge the Author to be young, that is, *Young as an Author*, as a Poet, because many of the Faults are Faults of Carelessness and Carelessness in the Midst of Care which is precisely a Young Author's Fault. He labours some parts and passes by the less important and untractable. I know not what I can do. The Work is published. Perhaps one or two of the periodical publications might notice it and quote a little. I know but one Mr. Campbell and know not—a Poet himself—how he would be disposed. If I were to advise, I would take a Specimen from the Introductory portion, but I am talking in the Dark. The Author probably knows his Way better than I do. It is seldom that a long Poem succeeds. Mr. Milman

published his 'Samor' a very long Poem with great Faults and Beauties. Nobody read it. He published 'Jerusalem' and his Tragedy, or Drama rather, was received well and encouraged him to go on and write—not so well I doubt, but encouraged him. What can I say more. There is promise. There is Evidence of Talent, but there is not that Finish, that powerful Interest that compells us to proceed. The Story in half the Compass would have told with double Effect. But I must leave the Subject, fearing that I have ill done what I would do in the best manner I could and that is the kindest. After all there is great Merit in Chinzica.

"I should be well pleased my dear Miss Charter to occupy a seat at your fire-side: if I dare give way to such Indulgences: I often think of Taunton, for I have passed through it in some Modes of Thinking, as Mr. Wordsworth says, that dwell upon me. I do earnestly hope that you will find the Situation pleasant in every Respect and associate with minds like your own: they are here and there to be found, but I have often lamented the Difficulty that keeps kindred Spirits asunder.

"I have been Solitary for 3 Months, my Son and Daughter being in Suffolk: I know not what to report of Edinborough for I was there at so particular and in some Respects . . . that I saw little of Scotland . . . seeing Scotland, however I did what I could in the time and took my Walks into various places where nobody expected or cared for me and those people I saw. I have no wish to go again.

"Tell me that You are not offended with my Frankness for that I expect of you: yet, you are interested and I almost repent. . . ."

It has not been possible to trace the poem "Chinzica" to which Crabbe so patently tried, for the sake of his friend, to be kinder than he felt.

Henry Milman's "Samor, Lord of the Bright City" had been published in 1818. Of it Southey said: "It is full of power and beauty—but too full of them." His "Fall of Jerusalem" which followed two years later was "crowned with the most general applause." The applause has long since died down.

* * *

On July 8, 1824, Crabbe took up once again the deferred duties of friendship, after a silence prolonged, as he explains, by a spell of sickness—presumably nervous as much as anything. It was sickness punctuated, however, with those pleasures in which he delighted, for in February of this year he was staying in Bath; writing to his elder son on the 16th of that month he said: "I wish most heartily that you could come, and let me introduce you to my friends who are in Gay Street, and were expressing their hopes of seeing you. . . . To-morrow I have a kind of school—or say College Examination to undergo in reading to Mrs. and Miss Hoare, who are by no means very easy to be satisfied."

"My dear Miss Charter,—That you meant for me a scolding Letter I will allow, but it is not in your Nature to execute such Purpose: yet I must suppose that you think I have been unmindful, not to say ungrateful in thus deferring one of the Duties of Friendship; but you are too good not to allow me to plead as well as I can—provided it be truly—for such Delay. I own that if a Man be even very ill and his Illness painful, He may nevertheless Write a Letter, especially if he can travel from place to place and pay visits and do Business, but then Pain is a perpetual Call for Indulgence and the Intervals of Pain for Lassitude: till within a few Weeks

my Disease became severe and its attacks very frequent, so that I was compelled to flee from the Coast after a Day or two and retire to a Sister's House where I was nurst for nearly 3 Months : at Length on Applying to a Physician in Burlington Street (Dr. Kerrison) I was put under a Course of Diet and Medicine that have in a great Degree wrought a Cure : I have Pain but it is very bearable, this is one Circumstance that you must weigh with Kindness : the other is incurable, I am very, very nearly arrived at the generally allotted period when the Intercourse of human Beings is closed by that which terminates all here, for my next Birth-day will be the 70th. The three-score and ten that is so solemnly stated in the Language of Sacred Writ. And what plea is this you will ask ? No more than other Infirmities ; they all bring on a slowness of Mind and Body. We defer even what we like to do when we once set about the Doing it ; but come I will not teize you with Apology : it is better to depend upon that Friendliness and Readiness to forgive, which I well know, but know as well that I ought not to make your Merit the Excuse for my Failing.

" You have my sincere Thanks for your Advice. I am indeed much indebted to the kind Solicitude of my Friend. I tried many Things, but not till I saw Dr. Kerrison did I attend to my Diet ; by his Advice I left off Wine and eat very sparingly of Meat, in fact Abstinence is I verily believe a Relief in all complaints and a Cure in many. The Medicine I chiefly took was Bark with Steel in large doses often repeated. I shall be glad to hear a better Account of your Sister : has not her Complaint some Affinity with mine ?

" I give you Joy of your Nurseling : We also have a little Miss who at present promises to live and I learn from my Elder Son that he likewise has a Girl added to his three so that Creatures of our Denomination are likely to increase plentifully : they are pleasant enough

Wilbury House, Wilts

when they begin to comprehend, but before that time, we must love them for their Parents' Sake rather than their own. I rather envy your Coast-Excursions: The Sea in Devonshire is delightful and the Country also, Sidmouth and Dawlish have many Attractions and probably other Places in that Neighbourhood. It is I own vexatious that you should have been in Town and were so kind, so ineffectually, but the Truth is, that of late I have staid no longer than I have been compelled by Engagements and One of these will call me there again, if Mr. Murray and I can persuade Ourselves that it will answer any good Purpose; Now the good Purpose to us, is the Hope of obtaining payment for our Industry and Courage, for Courage is always required when a Man prints a Book of any kind for it is saying, I can either entertain or inform you and yet we know too well that many a Work is published, without doing either and that cost the poor Author Time and Study and probably raised his Expectation of Fame or Profit much too high.

"In May, my dear Lady when you were at Bath, I was at Hampstead at the House of Mr. Hoare a Gentleman with whom and with whose Family, I have been some Years on the most friendly footing. How I came connected with such People as Bankers is a Mystery to me, and yet he is not the only one to whom Fortune has allied me.

"I saw Mr. Bowles in the only Day I was in Town and he was then much better; indeed nearly recovered and his Spirits were in their usual State.

"How I am to be disposed of this Summer, for disposing of myself is out of the Question, I do not precisely know. I purpose to go to Town very soon but I hope to stay a few Days only. My Suffolk relations expect me I believe, and I must probably visit that Coast but I do not think of any long Excursion. The Month of October was once allotted to a purpose that

I suppose will be given up and this poor imperfect Account is all that I can give. Time brings forth Purposes as well as Events.

"Will you present my best Respects to Lady Malet? I do not forget her obliging Reception of me, nor my brief Visit, but I was with a Gentleman whose Will decided all Things that came in his Way. I hope Genl. Peachey is well. He was always kind to me and I regret that I see so little of him. You call yours a scolding letter: Mine you may call an insipid one and then we may dispute which is the happiest Specimen of Letter Writing, but as you scold so prettily I shall not object. Good-bye dear Friend for the present, there is much to which I must attend. Heaven bless you."

* * *

In the autumn Crabbe wrote again (on November 9), including in the letter a passage on old age remarkable for simplicity and serenity. That he was feeling the weight of his seventy years then nearly completed is certain, but it was "an old age serene and bright" which claimed him. Still he liked—though, as he said, age postpones doing even that which it likes—to hold converse with his friends by letter; still he enjoyed the society of such friends as he could meet on his visits to town or on some holiday in their company. The stay at Ilfracombe was made with the Hoares, though he refrains from mentioning the fact.

"My dear Miss Charter,—You will admit that Illness is a just Plea for a Man's Silence, but not the Burden of the seventy Years. To be sure if at that period there is no more than the common Decline of the Faculties and that gradual as it is in some Cases, Your judgment would be correct, but Alas my dear Lady, this Period of Man's Life is generally attended by all

Kinds of Infirmities, of Body and Mind, with I know not how many Weaknesses beside: It is as much as We can fairly do to guard against the peevishness and Impatience of our Tempers especially when we are subject to some Pain as this tenacious and troublesome Disorder of mine causes so repeatedly that I think it will not be conquered. A Dr. Kerrison fought with it successfully and drove it off the Field for three Months: then it came again, though with less Severity and again we battled for a considerable Time during the last Summer and sometimes I did believe that I should be victorious, but Alas! what poor and brief Triumph was mine.

"I past two Weeks from my own House, crossing the Water from Swansea to Ilfracomb and returning without other Evil than a grievous Sea-sickness, but if I brought no ill I soon found it; and this obstinate and persevering Disease attacks me many times in the Day, nay in the Hour and I have felt several of these Spasms on one side of my Face, since I began to write to you; These spasmodic Affections—to speak learnedly—are very short, and indeed were they not and did they not go entirely off, I do not believe that I could command attention enough to thank you for your Letter or to undertake to write One for myself. All this you will receive, not merely as an Account of my State of Health, but as an Apology for the Weakness of the Mind that so often accompanies that of its Companion.

"I am indebted to you for an Account of your Movements, but I have Little indeed to give in return. I did not, as I usually do, pass any part of the Summer in Suffolk or Norfolk, nor paid my Respects to my Friends in Cromer or my Relations in Beccles and Aldborough; the latter a Suffolk Borough which helped me to my Scenery and some of my Characters in the Poem which I have called by that Name: it is also that place in which I first saw any Object, and one of the first which

I beheld was probably a stormy sea for the House was just beside the High-water Mark and the Time, the 24 December! A bleak Season for a poor Boy to enter upon his Warfare, but no Matter, He has almost done fighting and is now sitting in peace, (though not entirely freed from pain) and writing a wearisome Letter to his Friend Miss Charter, who after this Specimen of Sickly Writing will be careful how she calls for any more of his Exercise in this Way.

"That some people never grow old, never exhibit the Infirmities of Age is perhaps true, though I should require the evidence of the Fact from competent judges always residing with the aforesaid Immortals, but be it granted there are such, I pray you my dear Friend if you have Occasion for the Service of such happy Beings—and yet, happy! Query ?—Come not hither: I feel the pleasant Cloud of Oblivion Weakness and Alienation from the things around me, gradually—I would not wish it to be rapidly—increasing: It is not Disgust nor Dislike to the World we live in, nor by any Means is it Indifference, but assuredly there comes on in Age, an Abstraction of Self from those about us. Our thoughts turn to the past or to the future and we are not so interested in the Things immediately present; but I shall give you a proof indeed of Infirmity if I go on thus: If I cannot vary the Manner, I may the Subject.

"I have been following you, once more my dear Miss Charter as your Letter describes your movements, and I congratulate you and your excellent Friend Lady Malet on the Event of your Journey. I hope the little Fellow continues to dissipate all the Apprehendsions that were felt for him. I have probably taken my Farewell of Sidmouth: It is a delightful place, but the Remembrance does not afford me unmixed Satisfaction. I acquit myself of anything very Atrocious, but one's Weaknesses are not the most

pleasant Subjects for Contemplation: and then the ridiculous Agitation of the good people about nothing.

"It is amusing to look back upon the trivial Circumstances that once made Trifles important. I borrowed a great Wrapper-Coat of the Waiter of an Hotel and you can not readily conceive what a fine romantic Business was made of the *Disguise* forsooth! In honest Truth there was no such thing as Disguise, nor Occasion for it, and when the Coat came home, if it bore true witness it would have described an Evening past, not advisedly nor discreetly perhaps, but soberly and virtuously as prudence herself could have required; Oh! you know not the vindictive Looks of the dear Creatures in the Public Library, and all for what it was impossible they could be correctly informed of, but enough of this: I do not mean to go, neither do I make vows against Sidmouth.

"A poor Woman called at my Door, since I have been Conversing with you, and gained her Purpose by naming Taunton as her Home: so it is that Motives insinuate themselves into our Minds and we oftentimes impute that to our Resolution or our prudence which was caused by some kind thought dropt among our other Cogitations and overruling them all. You dwell in a populous town, ornear One, and Fires are probably too familiar, but you have not frequently One so destructive as that which on Friday night consumed the largest Factory in our County. The blaze from the many Windows was exceedingly terrific: my Son and I called on Mrs. Cooper the wife of the Principal and more active partner and found her composed and as a Christian perfectly resigned and thankful that no Loss occurred greater than that of property, yet this good Lady was in a wretched make-shift Cottage Room, with an Infant in a Cradle, and she expecting her Confinement every Day. Unquestionably in all Trials of this Description, you leave us far behind you. Resignation is

certainly incumbent on all as a Christian Duty, but it seems to belong to the Sex as a feminine Virtue.

"I bid you farewell my dear Miss Charter: if I be well enough I think of seeing London in the Spring-Months and as Business—if such Concerns as mine with Mr. Murray can be so denominated—may detain me, I must not attempt to fix the time of my Return. If you ever have anything like business at Bath or anything there be interesting to you; recollect that I live in the neighbourhood and often go thither.

"Will you convey my best Respects to Lady Malet, and my kind Remembrances to your Sister, her being yours makes us more familiar than I should otherwise presume to be, we met once and it may be that I may be favoured again. I past through Taunton, but Stage Coaches are untractable Things, nor could I have seen you, probably, had They been more indulgent. Need I say that I shall be glad to hear of and especially from you. Yours, my dear Miss Charter, truly and affectionately yours,

"Geo. Crabbe.

"We are glad you have not increased your cold by your disagreeable walk to N. If Mrs. B. requires any commission executed I shall be glad to save you the trouble of coming in if I can do anything for her. We are in hopes of Charles's returning to-day."

The postscript appears to have been added by another hand. A couple of months later Crabbe was taking part in the inauguration of the Bath Royal Library and Scientific Institution. This building, which remains, mellowed with those sombre tints with which Time decorates the Bath stone, much as it was in Crabbe's time, was built on the site of those Lower Assembly Rooms wherein Mrs. Piozzi had celebrated entrance into her eightieth year by dancing amid the great

company which she had invited to celebrate the event. The place of lively entertainment gave way to one of more lasting significance, or, as one writer put it, "the exertions of the *toes* have given place to the exertions of the *head*." An inaugural lecture was given by Sir George Gibbes in the presence of a distinguished gathering, and a dinner followed at which speeches were delivered by the triumvirate of poets—George Crabbe, Thomas Moore, and William Lisle Bowles.[1]

* * *

Six months of quiet Trowbridge life had passed when again Crabbe wrote to Elizabeth Charter, but the labours of the clergyman were seemingly proving irksome to him. His curate-son had gone off to East Anglia for a holiday, and though the elder son came to take his place for the time, it is probable that he was not able to relieve his father so much as the one who had long since become accustomed to the work of the parish.

"My dear Miss Charter,—At the time when you kindly sat down to write to me, I was endeavouring to pass through the Duties of the Day—good Friday—as well as my Indisposition permitted; for though I am much less affected by it, I still feel the pain that has so long kept Possession of one part of my face and a part that sometimes, when I am thus visited, affects my voice, yet I live in Hope that it will either entirely cease or become very tollerable and I ought to be thankful that at my time of Life, I have no other Complaint of a painful Nature. If you, my dear Miss Charter, make Apologies what must I do? Let us forgive mutually, for that must be to my Advantage. We have both been engaged, but in very different Manner: you in the

[1] In 1905 a commemoration tablet to the three poets was unveiled in the Institute.

kindest of Offices nursing and attending upon the sick, and I rejoice with you that they are sick no longer. I have not been entirely freed from such domestic Visitations, for in the absence of my younger Son, his Wife, their little girl and her Nurse, who are gone to visit their Friends in Suffolk I have the Company of the larger Family of my elder Son and my Daughter in Law with her four children have kindly put an end to my solitude. A short time after their arrival, the Measles came among them and three of the little ones have been confined by it, but the fourth at present escapes and we are all tollerably well again, and I hear the joyful Sounds of the Nursery proclaiming that there is no Sickness there.

"I can scarcely inform you how the Winter and Spring passed with me. I was not well, but not so ill as to be confined to my House and sometimes I visited Bath, to which Place I retain much Partiality. There I first saw you and there we had a pleasant morning—I speak at least for myself—that I should be well pleased to pass again.

"Did I inform you that General Pauy and Col. Houghton called on me at Trowbridge? He was in his usual Good Spirits and spoke of his Friends with his usual Good Humour repeating his obliging Invitation to me, but Alas! I cannot go from one place to another as I was Accustomed to do and you can scarcely conceive how much I am perplexed by Honours that heretofore would have highly gratified my Vanity. I am chosen Member of the Bath Institution, and of two in London, and except the Expense of Introduction have yet reaped nothing from the Favour done to me—and what are such Honours when we date three score and ten? They are just what they ought to be. I have not been in Town, and my Negotiation with Mr. Murray stands perfectly still, yet I do not say it is terminated, on the Contrary I have the same Intention and look forward—late as the Time is—for a final publication.

If I do not effect this, I shall at least leave my Verses with my Sons who will be more dilligent than their Father : there is not much to do and one Month's Severe Attention, exclusively given to the work would terminate my Labour, but Trowbridge is a place that calls for much of a Minister's Time and leaves him not much Leisure for his more private concerns.

"I will not forget the place of Lady Malet's residence, but am I to see you there should I be in Town ? and when will you come and see me in my study ? Are you in earnest and will you not say when this will be ? It would mortify me, if I were absent on such Occasion and yet I am frequently going to one place or other, though my Time is chiefly past at Home and there, need I say, I should be happy to see you. You would find us, a Family glad to have our Friends when we can catch them. I am sorry to hear of your repairs and painting etc., because I fear such kind of Business is not quite congenial with your Mind. I was at Taunton for some hours in my way with a young Friend, from Ilfracombe, but I was ill and impatient for the Coach to take me Home, the Sea—for I came from Swansea—making me very uncomfortable, long after I left the packet. Will you remember me when you join your Sister again and Lady Malet ? and will you also do this, whether you see them or not ? The parting with your Friends and their pleasant Family, has I trust ceased to be painful. It is happy for us that Time does this, or Separation would in some Cases be painful indeed ; but even the final separation has its Comforts, and it is our wisdom as well as Virtue to be prepared with them. Your account of your deceased Friend is interesting but mortifying : I would be what I am ever Conscious of not being—the Virtues of the Father, that at first augment the Grief of those whom he leaves, will soon be their Consolation : that is our Comfort when such Men leave us.

" The Subject, you mention, would admit of a long argument but I do not feel equal to it : I mean the triumph of the Mind over the Ruins of the Body : how often is it visible that they decline together, and Again tho' perhaps not so often, that the Mind is lively and undamaged when the Frame is weighed down by Infirmity : It is an interesting but difficult Enquiry and must be left with a number of deeply important Subjects to that Being who alone is infinitely wise and good.

" Adieu, my dear Friend, forgive me when I am— what you must not call forgetful, for that I am not, but Self-indulgent and Satisfying myself with kind wishes and purposes of amendment. I do not much mind your chiding me, but do not I pray you be seriously displeased for that would vex me and you are too good to do that and at such Distance too. Heaven bless you, believe me ever . . ."

The reference to the journey from Ilfracombe through Taunton was probably after the conclusion of the holiday during the previous autumn, of which Crabbe had already told something to Miss Charter in the preceding letter. His " young friend " was probably Miss Hoare, and again he seems to refrain purposely from mentioning her name, as though he would not remind his correspondent that she was not the only object of his elderly affectionate regards.

" Heaven bless you, believe me ever . . ." with those words the correspondence comes to a close, or the ten years of it which have come down to us ; whether, however, Crabbe continued writing to Elizabeth Charter and the letters have disappeared, or whether the friendly talks by post lapsed off into that silence which it is not easy to break, cannot now be said. George

Crabbe survived nearly six years longer and Elizabeth Charter lived until 1860.

* * *

A few days after George Crabbe had dispatched that letter to Elizabeth Charter he received one that may well have seemed a yet more surprising voice from the past than the one with which his correspondence with Mrs. Leadbeater began. This new letter was to revive relations with one friendship with whom dated back to the days before the poet had met that "Mira" who was to be his wife. The letter, which is briefly endorsed "Answered, June 3, 1825," runs thus:

"Preston Vale,
"(Not dear Preston Hill ! ! !)
"Parkridge,
"Stafford, Feb. 1823.

"Yes—182*3* now 2*5*. No mistake.

"Ever too prone to be propelled by the spur of the moment, and not believing that *second* thoughts are always best, I yield to the impulse of the *first*, 'in once more and again,' presenting to your eyes, characters—which mightily gratified vanity brings to my recollection, that you once said, seemed to be gifted with the power of magic. Oh ! I remember it well !—and think of it—not as then ; for then I laughed, but now—what now ! Look pensive ; grave ; and smile ; and smile with pleasure, too, and *almost* laugh.

"But what is the spur which goads me on to write at this moment !—A re-perusal of manuscripts which were dated some of them about fifty years back. Your name was George then. What is it now ? And mine was Stella. But at *such* a George in canonicals, and a Stella with spectacles—even gravity itself must relax into risibility.

"Yes; I was disappointed that you did not write to me. Oh! you knew him not. No, not so much as if you had never seen him. Had you for the last thirty years been near him—I speak it with the most *adoring gratitude*, and with the most solemn truth—you would have loved him with more than a brother's love. Kindness was his characteristic: to promote the happiness of others, seemed to be all his business. Respected and beloved by all within his vicinity, still am I continually gratified by repetition of the excellence of his character.

"Am I excused? I hope so. If not, I cannot help it. What I have written is a truth, the force of which, when writing to you, I could not resist.

"But shall I send to you this propelled—this out-of-date *fragment!?* Time will shew.

"And now let me ask how you are, and how—if I *do* burden the mail-coach with——

"*Preston Vale, still,* May 21st 1825.

"It is almost too bad to send so many miles, a scrip of paper of such widely differing dates. But what can I do? Write I must, or feel dissatisfied. I have had a letter—a *sad letter*—from Mary Sparkes. She says you often talk of me; and that's enough. But she says what is much more, that you wish to see me. Could my frame move with one hundredth part of the volatility with which my spirits fly, that wish should soon be gratified. But ah! my dear George!—for George you must be to me, or nothing at all—my flights are over. I am but little more than living lumber, wishing, I sometimes fear too fervently, for a flight still higher than any I have yet taken; and which, I humbly hope and trust, would re-unite me to all whom we have loved. *Have* loved! *Do love!* Oh, how dearly! Another thing has snapped in the release of my dear Susan. We are almost all gone! But you have still such ties—such lengthening cords! While I!—But avaunt every thought but gratitude. Oh! I am sometimes *so* happy!

For surely my carriage is making ready ! On the fourth of last January I entered my seventy-sixth year : may I then not hope—But self—ever intrusive self—be quiet, and tell your friend how much you wish to know *how* and *what* he is ; and how many there are that in this world belong to him. Often, very often, do I talk of you with the gentleman in whose family I reside. He is your greatly admiring, and did he know you personally, would be your affectionate friend, for he has a heart as well as a head. He has much wished to see you. His name is Brewe.

" But are you—a popular preacher ?—a fashionable preacher ?—or no preacher at all ? Fashionable ! Yes ; fashion has wormed itself into even Religion ! There are who will give sixty minutes to a text from the Apocalypse, that will not bestow half an hour to enforce, not illustrate, the sublime—the glorious truths of the Gospel ; yet call themselves, or are called, evangelical preachers. But I hope that neither you nor I, my dear friend, have now our Religion to chuse, as I trust it is that which has stood the test of more than eighteen hundred years—which can only be ornamented by its own beauty ; and by its own voice best explained.

" In this Country, we have a vast deal of talk about Religion. I wish it was more in the heart, and less upon the lip. But what am I doing ! Running into conversation. Can it be wondered at, when a memory that has not suffered the least impair, presents the realities of times past, as living images in the present ? But the Adieu must come. A little Adieu—And Then !

" Alethea Lewis."

That Mrs. Lewis was a lively correspondent this letter abundantly testifies, so lively that it is to be regretted we can find so little about her. Another long letter might be given, but it was written in 1789, when she and her husband had returned to England after a

fruitless seeking of fortune in America, and so belongs to a period far too early to have any significance in the romance of the elderly poet.

* * *

Alethea Lewis seems an elusive person. She is slightly referred to in the life of Crabbe by his son as having been engaged to a young surgeon-friend of the poet's, and as having introduced him to his future wife. Her letters suggest that it might be pleasant to know more of her, to be able to glance at those novels of which she is said to have been a busy producer, under the pen-name of Eugenia de Acton. The books, however, are as elusive as their author. In Allibone is the inadequately simple entry: "Acton, E. de, published sundry novels 1802–10," and from contemporary magazines some brief notices are recoverable, of which one (from the " Gentleman's Magazine " for May, 1801) may stand as representative :

" ' The Microcosm,' by the Author of ' Vicissitudes in Genteel Life.' These five volumes (which might perhaps have been compressed into three) have been long ready for the press, but a series of incidents delayed the publication, to the great inconvenience of the writer, she having other works nearly ready for printing, which wait only till the public opinion of this can be ascertained. It does not fall within our plan to point out all the most approveable passages in it, though many of its excellencies may escape the light readers of the age, for whose benefit they were penned. It is dedicated to Sir Edward Littleton, Bart., one of the representatives of the County of Stafford, to whom the fair authoress is under *immeasureable* obligations ; and she has addressed a prefatory letter to the Rev. William Johnstone. This

Westcroft House, Trowbridge

(The home of the Waldrons.)

letter closes with a list of subscribers, as their names were received, without any alphabetical arrangement or honorary distinction."

Another of her novels appears to have been "A Tale Without a Title."

* * *

In closing the year which seems to have terminated the correspondence with Elizabeth Charter we are able to give one of the letters which the poet wrote to Sarah Hoare, one of the "six female friends" with whom (but for a passing misunderstanding glanced at earlier) he remained on the most cordial footing to the end. That Crabbe maintained a steady correspondence with the Hampstead banker's family seems certain, yet but comparatively few of his letters to them appear to have been preserved, and therefore this is the more interesting. It is interesting, too, as suggesting a fuller and more intimate knowledge of his correspondent, both from the themes discussed and the manner of the discussion. The contrast seems to suggest that the first meeting with Elizabeth Charter awakened the poet's sentimental regard, and that they never met often enough after to allow either of the sentiment crystallising into something warmer, or developing into a sturdy friendship wherein it was unnecessary to underline or otherwise emphasise the sentiment.

This letter was written from Beccles (December 3, 1825), whither Crabbe had gone to pay a visit to his relatives.

"My dear Miss Hoare,—It is pleasant for me to think once more of seeing you before my return to Wiltshire. I have consented to stay the ensuing week,

but not with my whole heart, yet I believe that compliance is necessary. I have not been so well for the last 3 or 4 days, and my nights being feverish, it is possibly right that I should wait till this little excitement passes over.

" The principal subject of your letter is very interesting and by no means admits of very easy discussion, at least I feel myself unequal to it, not being a competent witness of the measure in which these earnest and zealous ladies and their friends among the clergy proceed in their visitations and conversions. Their success according to the best information which I can procure depends upon their evident desire of doing good to the persons visited : their zeal is manifest, and their kindness soothing. It was so with the Catholics, nay the Jesuits who did so much service in the half christianised settlements of Portugal, and must be so in all other places when persons of lower degree, and destitute of religious and moral instructions receive them from their superiors in situation and possessed of the requisites for conversion, benevolence, zeal and information. It is not the doctrine—though some tenets are more likely to engage the heart than others—that principally induce the person visited to attend and to admit whatsoever is offered to his fear, his hopes or his understanding, but the heart is softened and won over by the condescending kindness and charitable humanity of the ladies and gentlemen who are so good as ' to humble themselves to see poor creatures in their affliction,' and this is truth, no question, and prepares the way for the doctrines be they of whatsoever kind the instructors profess. In general I believe they are partially, but not entirely Calvinistical.

" Their great doctrine is the universal depravity of the whole human race in consequence of Adam's transgression. They dwell upon this long and earnestly, and find a ready acquiescence, for who much minds his

portion and part of a general debt, yet I believe the endeavour and the difficulty is in bringing on *conviction*, and a *lively sense* of this depravity, and when this feeling is brought on the rest is easy and at hand. 'As in Adam all die, so in Christ etc.' The great points to be gained are the terrors of conviction, and the joys that result from a full sense of the justification, and without these I doubt whether these converters of their brethren reckon them safe, at least so I have found in some cases, and one not long since, when a zealot of this class told me, I might go to —— and do what I could, but he was as dead as a stone and had no feeling of religion more than the bed he groaned upon, and she thought so. The poor man's convictions were not lively, and his hopes were humble and his expressions cold and timid —The conversions which they try for and pray for are conversions of the *heart*—that is of the feelings, and they succeed because it is not difficult to excite first the terror and then the exaltation of spirit so agitated by such people.

"Our ministers do not succeed in this manner, nor can it be. They are on *duty* and not, as the ladies, on a voluntary service. This is no small matter. In general we think it our business to enquire into and dwell upon the actual sins of the visited and to excite his horror of them and their consequences; rather than the general depravity of which we can speak so very little, and of which our Lord and Redeemer spoke nothing. This is not agreeable to the self-love of man, and is not the popular way of dealing with him and his offences. Then we ask no questions respecting the feelings, but as well as we can speak to the understanding. We read the service in the prayer-book, and we judge it right to speak of *conditions* of acceptance which a Calvinist will not admit. We tell men that repentance is necessary and a virtuous and religious life for the future, and for this we inform them that grace will be given if faithfully

asked and the life regulated by the rules and precepts of the Gospel.

" Now, my dear Lady, having stated as well as I can the methods taken by the one and other visitors of the poor, and, in general, ignorant, you will I believe agree that the first is much more agreeable to those persons than the latter and yet you will not agree with them who judge it to be the better way—I have much that might be written, but it would be cruel to proceed.

" I have not left the room for Mrs. B. and Mr. C. with whom I was not a little vexed, but their visit is over, and so far it is well. Perhaps when nothing can be done or said to prevent an union, Mr. K. will soften, but while the words are not actually pronounced, there is a possibility of the deed not being done.

" There is another cause of so many converts being made. The books are adapted to weak people and visionary, and some of them I think very exceptionable. At any rate, my dear Miss Hoare, our part and duty is to say and do that which we judge to be the true sense of the sacred writings and to pay at least as much attention and to hold in as much respect the words of our Redeemer himself, which we all comprehend, as those of his servant Paul, which in many places we do not.

" The verses are surely very poor, nor quite intelligible are they ?—' thou'rt twice rescued from the wave and the grave ' and how a *third* life and how a *better*—' Of such is the kingdom ' etc."

CHAPTER XII

THE END

"When Love felt hope, when Sorrow grew serene,
And all was comfort in the death-bed scene."
The Parish Register.

ALTHOUGH the beginning of May, 1825, saw the last of the letters written by George Crabbe to Elizabeth Charter, one or two letters and other documents remain which may well find a place here. Just a year later—May 4, 1826—he wrote from Trowbridge—where he had just joined the Bench of Magistrates—to his elder son, who was Vicar of Pucklechurch, and the letter shows him still suffering from that intermittent ill-health to which he not infrequently referred, but it showed him also as retaining his alertness in theological matters, touches upon the "labour troubles" of the time, and above all illustrates once again his tender affection for his family:

"Forgive me, my dear George, if I have appeared forgetful. I have deferred writing for many Days, always in hope of writing at my ease, but I cannot. The pain in one degree or other, with perpetual variation of its manner of attacking me, will come and I am compelled to take Medicines which are relief certainly but they also teaze and weaken me, so that I have no little contention with myself in order to keep a decent flow of spirits for common life. I thank you for your Letter and Mr. Scott's Treatise. True, I agree with him in his

principal idea, though even there I do not like the expression that Regeneration must precede Faith, but it is his Intricacy and his so strongly contending that Things must be as he has stated. There is so much of the Logician, and though he is in earnest it is with the spirit of one who fights for the Truth and loves the Fighting. He narrows the way and then what plain unlettered Christian is able to comprehend his meaning? I do not say he is wrong, but I have no doubt of there being many who differ very much from him and yet equal reasons may be urged for them. In fact, tho' I can but accord with Mr. Scott on the Nature of saving Faith, as distinguished from unproductive Belief, yet there is much in his Tract which I do not understand and not a little which I cannot agree to. See his Definition of Faith, Page 9–10.—

"How is Caroline? I want much to hear and though I can hope for the best, yet Hope wants to be strengthened now and then. We are on the whole better. Anne begins to ride again and John and I walk. Mrs. Crowfoot also is a walker. The little one has a cold. So much for the Bill of Health. How are your Accounts? Pray give them and of what kind soever, let us know.

"I entered the Room at the Wool-pack yesterday for the first time as a Magistrate. All is very well, but we want Dignity or rather Decorum. Mr. Waldron and Mr. Mortimer, too, are patient and I believe good and impartial judges of a poor man's case, but I have been accustomed to see in a room of this kind, a mode of conducting himself in every Attendant on the Magistrates that I do not observe at Trowbridge, but it is new and I am not an adequate judge at present. Mr. Timbrell was with me but had to retire very soon on Business.

"We yet escape the alarm that is in Manchester and other places, yet we have distress and I suppose it is felt in some degree throughout the Country, yet it

cannot materially affect your poor. We must have coals and people must be paid for raising them. Money however, may not be forthcoming so plentifully as it has been and that may cause some Uneasiness.

"A short Note from Beccles tells me that all are well and that I am expected. I shall be sorry to disappoint my good sister but I must obtain two Helps to a journey of that length neither of which are at present within my reach. I must have more strength, or certainly more freedom from pain, and I must procure some brother in the Church who has leisure to officiate for me and who is not clogged by the Impediments which made our connection with our two late assistants so troublesome.

"How is your Garden? Or what rather I would ask, how are you now disposed towards it? The late Frost I am told—for I see not—has nipt the early fruit, the apple blossoms and the young pears, so says Mr. Clark. I cease to feel an interest of the kind.

"I am too late for the day's post, which I am sorry for, because we want much to hear of you all and especially of Caroline. My love to her and all kind wishes and to my dear little Folk of the Nursery. Mr. W. Crowfoot is expected I learn but merely for a medical man's visit a day or two but of this I am not certain. It may be more. My pain has so interrupted me that I will not be sure that you will not perceive it in the writing and in what is written too.

"I am, my dear George, Affectionately, G. CRABBE."

The Caroline of this letter was the wife of the poet's son, George; Anne, as we have seen earlier, was the wife of the other son, John, and the Mrs. Crowfoot referred to was probably her sister-in-law, for Dr. Crowfoot was her brother. Mr. Timbrell was the father of the younger George Crabbe's wife.

* * *

Crabbe is referred to as Elizabeth Charter's "old beau" in a rhyming epistle addressed to the lady in the beginning of 1827 (postmarked Jan. 30, 1827). The letter appears to be in a woman's handwriting, but the only signature is "J. C."—initials which do not fit anyone mentioned in the correspondence other than John Crabbe, and the lines are assuredly not his.

"Why—What can this be? I hear you exclaim
A Poem without either title or name?
No, a Letter in Rhyme, tho' tis scarcely reveal'd
The matter, and style, are so *ably* conceal'd!!
It seems most sublime, on a cursory view;
And yet, of the writer I'm ignorant too,
'Tis *Southey!!!* that Bard of all Bards I can see,
For pathos, and feeling, no equal has he
But stay—on a *further* perusal I doubt—
Has not *Crabbe* my old Beau again found me out?
I'm really perplex'd—but the sequel must show
The name, and abode, of the Author I trow.
Whoe'er this may be, you will certainly own,
His talent for rhyming most plainly is shown
Combined with ideas so novel, and bright
That all other men are eclipsed by him quite.
Without furthur preamble I must commence
An oration, on what? why on plain common sense
Yet, to write on *this* theme it would *surely* be vain
As I find to my grief, that I have not *one* grain.
The subject I then in despair must discard
Tho' I'm sure you'll agree, that it is *rather* hard.
Songs, Waltzes, Quadrilles, such amusements as these
Encomiums on *them* I may write if I please,
But no, I'm quite tired of such frivolous stuff
On *this* theme my muse would be tardy enough.
Oh! welcome, *more* welcome than ever to me,
Is my dear quiet home from these follies so free,
Where in pensive reflections my days pass away,
And my sadness un-noticed can have its full sway.
This year seems for me to presage many woes;
From the days that are gone could I estimate those

Of the months that remain I should certainly fear
That sorrow o'er me would preside through the year.
But though it *begins* with events that are sad,
Yet why should I think 'twill *continue* so bad,
For the clouds of the morn, oft conceal ev'ry ray
Of that orb which shines *bright* at the *close* of the day
Whate'er is ordained by an All-wise decree
Whether sorrow or pleasure be destined for me
The fond thought dearest Bess that you are my Friend
And e'er will be so till this chequered life end
Will give sorrow a *balm*, and pleasure a *zest ;*
And hush every turbulent feeling to rest.
My very best love to the dear ones at home
May *their* path be on *flow'rs* tho' on *thorns others roam*
May you, dear Louisa, and worthy Aunt Anne,
All derive ev'ry joy from this world that you can
And ripen'd for glory, when time is no more
May Seraphs conduct you to *Heav'ns bright shore.*
Here's just room for a nice little postscript I see
Which I'll take, tho' provoked I am sure you will be
Tis only to beg that you'll answer this soon,
As it will be to me a most welcome boon.
One word dear Elizabeth more I would say
Let this stupid scrawl past neglect, wipe away,
In weal, or in woe, still believe me to be
Your very *affectionate faithful* J. C."

* * *

In the summer of 1828 Crabbe was staying once more with the Hoares at Hampstead Heath—"I have my home with my friends here and exchange it with reluctance for any other"—and had the novel experience of going up the Thames in a steamboat as far as Richmond.

Dated January 27, 1829, we have a further letter of Crabbe's addressed to his dear friend Miss Hoare. The troubles hinted at in the letter to his son have become more acute and the increase of unemployment was evidently marked at Trowbridge, and the protests of

the working people against the setting up of machinery found a sympathiser in the poet. Judging by this single letter it would seem—as would be only natural—that personal intercourse with his correspondent enabled him to write, as has been said, more spontaneously to Sarah Hoare than to Elizabeth Charter :

"My dear Miss Hoare,—Much as you may have been accustomed to Winter Journeys, I am right glad to see the ice broken up and the Snow melted away, before you leave Hampstead. I felt, and that severely, the late Wintery Visitation which brought the pain to my face again that once more assumed its old manner of attack : that the cold brought the pain, I may believe, for in the night of the Thaw I felt easier and though my Face is now sore with the continual pressure of my Fingers to procure ease, and I have yet these electrical returns of the Disease I am sensible of the Difference, and thankful for it : this to be sure is a tedious way of informing you that cold having affected me might likewise be injurious to you, and especially on a Journey. Now there is good hope of mild weather and I shall even think of you as at Brook or Seething. Will you do me the honour of remembering me when with your Friends, who have always treated me with much kindness.

"I was a little disappointed by your dismissing the Subject of the Man of perfectability in so few words after exciting my Curiosity. I confess I should have thought with you that a Mind so prone to Flightiness on one subject would not be intirely sane on any, but Man is a strange Being and there is no accounting for many things relating to him, which we should not expect, for the Errors of the Experienced and the Wonderings of the Wise. Nothing has occurred at Trowbridge that indicates a combination among a great Part of the Inhabitants, and the Reply given to a representation of the State of the Town to the Magistrates was One that

keeps them quiet, and perhaps Watchful, but points out nothing by way of Advice or Command. I have no serious Apprehensions: true I am sorry for the want of Sufficient Work for the Willing and Industrious, and like you, I lament the use, and still more the increase, of Machinery; yet what can be done? Other Countries not so burdened with debt as we are contend with us: they also make Cloth and Birmingham Wares, and we are told that to lay aside our Inventions is to give up our Trade. God knows what will be the result of such Dilemmas, where on one side, the Masters feel the Necessity of employing Agents who do not eat or drink, and on the other the men who are hungry and thirsty, threaten, and no wonder, their Rival the machines with utter Destruction. Who can truly say, if I were a master I would give up Machinery, if I were a workman I would starve in quiet? I leave the melancholy subject. A way will be found, though my Wisdom is at a loss where to look for it. The Mule would not be tollerated in this Neighbourhood, and yet it is a sad thing to check and baffle Ingenuity, though a worse to do this by Hunger joined with a will to labour: so I said before: I am arrived at the age of Repetition and Forgetfulness, but I know whom I am writing to. One of whom I should be afraid if I did that which was not lawful and right, but of whom I am not in fear because I write that which is uninteresting and trifling. I love my Friend well enough to trust my weaknesses with her.

"That is a curious kind of Hallucination which Miss B. discovers in her addresses to Imaginary Beings. It comes very near to a case which I read long since in the Trials of Witches, a book I should like to see again. A Mother summoned an old poor neighbouring woman before a Magistrate, who committed her and she was tried for bewitching a girl who sitting with the Family, would on a sudden call out 'There! Mother (I forget

the Witch's name) Mother —— has sent her little devils to tempt me again,' and then she described two fairy like Beings the size of her little Doll who bade her tell stories and steal Cake and Sugar for no harm would come of it and she would reply and repeat the Commandments and then tell those about her what the Spirits said in answer, etc. As these could not be tried, the Old Woman who sent them was, and escaped burning by the good sense of the Judge, who even in the Reign of King James, supposed it to be more likely that a Girl's imagination should be disordered than it was that a poor infirm Woman should have the command of Spiritual Beings, or send them on a personal controversy with a child.

" I hope to hear that your journey has been pleasant and your visit just that which you like: no more objection to men though because they have turned their mind to Subjects which are not absolutely religious and are sometimes accompanied by those to which there may be objection but are the more ignorant of such matters so pure that they escape all Censure ? I doubt whether the Vice and Follies of those who do not burthen their minds with Knowledge or much learning are more eligible Companions than Students and Readers and even Writers and Authors. I should have written before had I been more free from Pain, but my fingers shook with perpetual use and pressing the Nerve into Numbness. I can now, when the attack is made, let it pass off in its own time except in the case of a more urgent call. The Hooping Cough is yet with us, and many children die of it. The Bell now tolls for one fine little girl just departed. I wish for Subject more Amusing or interesting, but you are a Stranger to my neighbours and the Makers of Cloth among us. One of whom I hear talks of buying a Borough and speaking in the House of Commons. Another has purchased a large Farm that he may shoot unmolested, but these and

one or two others who gained their Money when Trade was most profitable, no such things are now done. My Friend Waldron has just entered into Partnership with our Banker ; wisely I hope, cautiously I am sure. His Sister and Brother are both yet confined in their Rooms, but are recovering. If I gave you more Accounts they must be of petty Quarrels and peculations for which it is difficult to find a punishment for what is stolen is [ ] indeed and not a purse.—Once more a pleasant journey. You will write when you find a leisure half hour : Remember me to all my Friends, but to one especially, Yours ever affectionately,

"GEORGE CRABBE."

* * *

Crabbe in his later years several times visited the Hoares at Hampstead—" I cannot tell how pleasantly " —and other visits were paid—notably one in the autumn of 1830 to Hastings, whither he went with the Hoares, and where he looked his last upon that sea which had ever fascinated him from the earliest Aldeburgh days. These matters belong to his fuller biography. Age was telling upon him, and his recurring neuralgic pains troubled him much, at times attacking him so evidently in the pulpit as to distress his parishioners. Yet he continued to officiate in the church up to within the last two Sundays of his life. On February 3, 1832, he passed away in the seventy-eighth year of his age.

* * *

It was the ready appreciation of George Crabbe's genius by Edmund Burke that set the former in the way to a comfortable future, and that the poet never forgot his debt to the orator is certain, for at the very

close of his life we have evidence of the quickness with which he responded to an appeal on behalf of a fellow-writer in distress. He received a letter (franked by Bulwer Lytton) from John Forster asking him to assist a project that had become necessary to rescue Leigh Hunt from "a hard crisis in his fortune." Crabbe drafted his reply on the application thus: "It would ill become me who have been so much indebted to the kindness of my Friends should I disregard the application which you are so good as to make in behalf of Mr. L. Hunt. My influence I fear is small, residing as I do where little except Cloth is made and little except newspapers read, this is not however without exceptions. I consider it as doing myself honour to join any attempt to serve a man for whose welfare those distinguished persons are interested whose names I find annexed to the paper designed for general circulation."

* * *

When the younger George Crabbe was contemplating writing his father's biography he sought recollections from various people who had known the poet, and among others from William Wordsworth, whose reply we are able to give. Though it contained no recollections of service to the biographer it is by no means without interest to-day, as showing how strong an impression the work of Crabbe had made upon the younger and greater poet. Wordsworth's letter was probably written in the early part of 1834:

"Dear Sir,—My communication with Messrs. Longman is so infrequent that your letter sent thro' them and dated Nov^{r} 11th only reached me last night. This

delay I regret very much, as my silence may have been attributed to inattention on my part, and you may have consequently repented of having made an application that I assure you I consider an honour. The Prospectus informs me that the first vol. of the work was to appear the beginning of February—and therefore is probably out already ; but neither you nor I have, on this account, cause to regret that your letter was so long delayed, as my opportunities of seeing your excellent Father were rare, and I never was in correspondence with him. Some three or four times I have met him at Mr. Hoare's on Hampstead Heath, and once or twice at Mr. Rogers's but upon none of these occasions was I fortunate enough to have any private or particular conversation with him. I first became acquainted with Mr. Crabbe's works in the same way, and about the same time, as did Sir Walter Scott, as appears from his letter in the Prospectus, and the extracts made such an impression on me, that I can also repeat them. The two lines

> 'For the happiest they
> The moping idiot and the madman gay'

struck my youthful feelings particularly—tho' facts, as far as they had then come under my knowledge, did not support the description ; inasmuch as idiots and lunatics among the humbler classes of Society, were not to be found in workhouses—in the parts of the North where I was brought up—but were mostly at large and too often the butt of thoughtless children. Any testimony from me to the merit of your revered Father's works would I feel be superfluous, if not impertinent. They will last from their combined merits as Poetry and Truth full as long as anything that has been expressed in verse since they first made their appearance. I remain, dear Sir, respectfully yours,

" Wm. Wordsworth.

" P.S.—In the year 1828, upon the application of Miss Hoare your Father was so obliging as to write in my daughter's album the following verses accompanied with a note in his own handwriting which should also be transcribed.

'Beside the Summer sea I stand,
When the slow Billows swelling shine.
How beautiful this pearly sand,
Be this delicious quiet mine :
Beneath this cliff my sheltered seat
To watch the entangled weeds ashore
To hear the rippling waters beat
And dream as I have dreamt before.
GEO. CRABBE.'

" ' Mr. Crabbe having ceased long since to compose verses is compelled to have Recourse to some written at so early a period, that it was not without full proof he was convinced they were justly imputed to him. Having no other he reluctantly troubles Miss W. with these.'

" And I may add she prizes them highly, as I, her Father do, they being evidence of that quietness of spirit and gentleness of feeling which marked his manners and conversation—as far as we had opportunities of intercourse with him."

* * *

With Sarah Hoare Crabbe's sons had much correspondence over their father's biography, and from the many letters which she addressed to them we learn that she wrote a short memoir designed as an anonymous introduction to a selection from the poet's works. That selection seems never to have been published, and Miss Hoare appears to have given her brief memoir to the biographer for inclusion in his work ; in whatever form her memoir appeared she stipulated that her name was not to be used. Her comments in one of these letters

on the faults of various biographers show that she took a somewhat restricted view of the duties of the writer of a "Life": "You know how Mr. Moore has tortured poor Lady Byron. Campbell *cannot* be trusted, if a memoir of Mrs. Siddons is justly attributed to him; he impertinently brings forth Lawrence's attachment to her daughter. Dr. Paris has no mercy on the peculiarities of Sir H. Davy, and I know a literary friend of your father's who amused a whole company with a story at his expense, and would probably amuse the public with more such tales were he to write his life—he might gratify malignity by detailing the story of poor Charlotte Ridout in exaggerated colours; not many weeks since, just before her death, her aunt spoke of Mr. Crabbe in bitter terms, and this aunt has no doubt her own coterie and the story may get abroad." Sarah Hoare also mentioned having in her possession an unpublished tale of the poet's entitled "Esther."

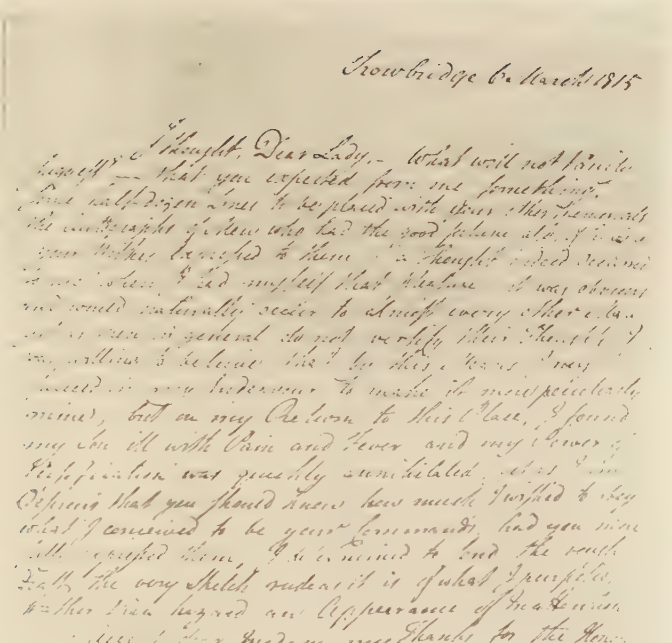
* * *

Of Elizabeth Charter's later years there is but little to be said, though, curiously enough, the only letter of hers which we are able to give must be one of the last which she ever wrote. It was addressed to her nephew and executor, and seems to reveal a lovable old woman. Its simplicity and sweetness certainly make us regret the more that her letters to Crabbe have not been preserved. It will be seen from the dates of the letter 1855–1859 that she long outlived her poet-admirer, and that a quarter of a century after his death she still occupied the much-abused cottage:

" Norton Fitzwarren, Nov. 20, 1855.

" My dearest Ellis,—I have this day completed the most important of my worldly concerns in making a new Will, not without earnest prayer for guidance knowing how seldom such Documents are entirely satisfactory to the survivors. If I have been guilty of any mistakes or omissions as they are unintentional so I hope they will be excused, and I should be glad to think may not cause one unkind word or thought. You, my dear Ellis, pretty well know the circumstances of our family, that four thousand two hundred pounds was what my sister Louisa and myself inherited from my Father's will and this house. I trust you will find I have not been a bad steward of this little patrimony and some few small legacies added to it. The plate, furniture, linen and books we derived from other sources, the former chiefly from my aunt Margaret Malet, except a few more recent presents and some of the spoons and four salt sellers [*sic*] purchased by ourselves ; the fish slice left to Allan was given to us by Mr. Gunston.

" Sept. 28th, 1859. This letter has been a long time in an unfinished state, my dearest Ellis, and now at the 11th hour I feel how wrong it is to procrastinate, having only just ascertained that an apparently trifling complaint is likely to shorten my span of life to probably a few days. May it please God, dear Ellis, to pardon my many and grievous sins, and thro' the intercession of my blessed Saviour to receive me into his everlasting Kingdom. It was only yesterday that I knew what my real worldly state was and I am this day trying to arrange my worldly affairs so as to give as little trouble as possible to the dear survivors and hope I have been able to make a just distribution of my small property. There are a good many little legacies to those dear friends who have contributed so largely to my comfort and happiness whilst in this world, and in the little



Snowbridge 6. March 1815

I thought, Dear Lady, — what will not friendship suggest — that you expected from me something. Some half-dozen lines to be played with three times over, & then remarked the misapplied pains of him who had the good fortune also, if it is a fortune, to please your mother. I thought indeed so, and was silent. I had myself that pleasure — it was obvious and would naturally occur to almost every other person in general to put worthless their thoughts & [illegible] believe this of me, Dear Lady, my [illegible] endeavour to make it misapprehended meaning, but on my return to this place, I found my [illegible] ill with pain and fever and my power of [illegible] was quickly annihilated. Let it suffice that you should know how much I wished to say what I conceived to be your commands, had you more [illegible] spoken them. I was denied to find the truth [illegible] the very skeleton under it is of what I profess, whether I can suggest any appearance of meaning [illegible] Dear Madam my thanks for the favour you confer upon me. I am [illegible] with a kind of melancholy pleasure. Pleasure it is for I have [illegible] and that is [illegible] you may make if you please because it will be probably [illegible] no more.

I have the honour to be, Dear Lady
respectfully [illegible]

GEORGE CRABBE'S FIRST LETTER TO ELIZABETH CHARTER

articles given as keepsakes I have been careful to select those that neither you or dear Agnes[1] would care to possess. You are both I know rich in plate and things so that I hope that you will each be satisfied and feel no disappointments; indeed I feel sure, dear Ellis, even if I should have unconsciously erred that you will believe the poor old Aunt has done her best and love and cherish her memory. It has pleased God to prolong my life to a good old age and to grant me many Blessings far beyond my deserts, I fear I have not been half thankful enough; if I should be spared through this fiery trial may I become more more grateful to a gracious God.

"You will find in the bureau in my dressing room a number of old papers and letters that ought to have been burnt I daresay years ago, chiefly relating to my Aunt's affairs. I have distroyed [*sic*] a good many and now not feeling satisfied with making my own will lest thro' ignorance any litigation should arise I am going this morning to put it into Mr. Sweet's hands. I wish the legacies to be paid within six months if convenient to my Executors.

"Sept. 29th. Upon answering Mr. Sweet he seemed to think my Will would do, so he only added another codicil and a memorandum. I trust they will give you no trouble. Now, God bless you, my dearest Ellis, and send you, dear Annie, and the dear children many years of happiness is the last wish and prayer of your ever affectionate Aunt

"Elizabeth Charter."

This kindly letter was written with the knowledge that death might happen at any time, but she lived a few months longer, and died on June 15, 1860, and was buried at Norton Fitzwarren, in Somersetshire.

[1] Her niece Agnes Ann Charter, who married Joseph Hume-Williams, Q.C. Mr. W. E. Hume-Williams, K.C., is their son, and therefore great-nephew to Elizabeth Charter.

* * *

A few words may be said of Miss Maria Waldron, another of the "female friends" of Crabbe's of whom we hear in the preceding letters. Her father, who had hospitably entertained the poet on his first arrival in Trowbridge, probably predeceased Crabbe, for in the church there is a marble to the memory of her brother, who died early in 1833, and is described as son "of the late John Waldron." A window in Trowbridge church is one of the memorials to Maria Waldron, and the inscription on it runs: "To the glory of God and in memory of Maria Waldron, born Dec 18 1785, died June 29 1872, this window is affectionately dedicated by the Thring family, 1873." Thus it will be seen that the lady whom local gossip persisted in engaging to George Crabbe outlived the poet by nearly forty years. She became one of the great ladies of Trowbridge, distinguished for her philanthropy towards the poor of the town with which her family had been so long associated, and left funds for the providing of coals and blankets that her work might continue when she had gone. The friendly intercourse of the Waldron family played a goodly part in the happiness of Crabbe's life in Trowbridge, and Westcroft, the handsome house in which they dwelt and where they were frequently visited by the poet, is still standing, and may well claim some of the affectionate attention of Crabbe pilgrims to the town.

INDEX

A

Ainger, Canon, 12, 40, 44, 51, 174
Alderson, Dr., 220
Algiers, Loss of, 145
Allen, Mr., 171
Allot, Miss, 149, 165
Astley, J. D., 236, 237
Austen, Jane, 28, 42

B

Bath, 17–20, 27–39, 43, 47, 49, 58, 61, 78, 81, 86, 103, 104, 107, 111, 112, 117, 121, 124, 125, 131, 132, 134, 140, 147, 148, 151–156, 163, 165, 187, 188, 197, 198, 201–204, 209, 210, 216, 220, 224, 228–230, 236, 240, 262, 267, 274, 276
Bath Characters, 34
Bedford, Duchess of, 171
Bellair, Miss, 89, 90
Belmore, Countess of, 36
Belvoir Castle, 14
Benett, John, 212, 213, 237, 238
Benett-Stanford, J. M., 212
Benett-Stanford, Vere Fane, 212
Beresford, Rev. Gilbert, 20–25
Bessborough, Countess of, 51, 171
Betty, W. Henry, 29
Blackwood's Magazine, 221, 235, 255, 256
Bonnycastle, John, 206–208
Bonnycastle, Sir Richard, 207
Boswell, James, 172
Bowen, Rev. J., 32, 33
Bowles, Canon William Lisle, 25, 26, 34, 39, 47, 53, 64, 101, 102, 112–114, 163, 164, 184, 185, 192, 193, 217, 226, 231, 237, 241, 254, 269, 275
Bowles, Caroline, 61, 62
Bray, Mrs., 223
Brice, Rev. Mr., 240
Brisco, J. F., 197
Buonaparte, Napoleon, 31
Burke, Edmund, 50, 171, 295
Burney, Fanny, 182
Burns, Robert, 18
Byron, Lady, 299
Byron, Lord, 13, 18, 66–69, 172, 173, 176, 181, 184, 185, 211, 235, 241, 247

C

Caldwell, Bess, 36
Campbell, Thomas, 171–173, 223, 241, 247, 265, 299
Canning, George, 174–176
Carr, Miss, 187, 190
Catalini, Madame, 31
Chantry, Francis, 257

Charlotte, Princess, 182, 197, 198
Charter, Emma Frances, 52
Charter, Elizabeth, 27, 38, 43, 47, 50; her birth, 52; her tribute to Sir C. Malet, 54, 55; her first meeting with George Crabbe, 58, 61, 62; her album, 56–76; her second meeting with G. C., 77; her "jealousy," 149, 150, 155; her quarrel with Rev. William Douglas, 160–162, 164; she comes to London, 206; a thinning correspondence, 251–252; her later years, 299; one of her last letters, 300–301. (See also under Crabbe, George, Letters to Elizabeth Charter.)
Charter, Fanny L. E., 52
Charter, Louise, 136, 137, 139, 141, 149, 153, 163, 169, 181, 192, 211, 221, 241, 246, 250, 268, 277
Charter, Thomas, 52
Charter, Thomas Malet, 52–54
Charteris, Col., 102, 104, 105
Cobbett, William, 155
Colburn (Publisher), 121
Coleridge, S. T., 73–75, 247
Coleridge, Sara, 63
Constable, Archibald, 256
Conway, W. A., 29
Cornwall, Barry, 73–75
Cottage Dialogues, 50
Crabbe, George; his married life, 12; becomes Rector of Trowbridge, 14–18; his intimacy with the Waldrons, 19; at Bath, 28–37; his friendship with Bowles, 39; his susceptibility, 40, 41; his regard for Miss Ridout (see under Ridout, Charlotte); his regard for Sarah Hoare, 47, 48; his regard for Mary Leadbeater, 50, 51; his first meeting with Elizabeth Charter, 59–62; his second meeting with E. C., 77; his hesitation, 91; his loneliness, 117; his view of Christmas, 118; his sermons, 122, 183–185, 189; he tires of Bath, 124, 125; his recollections of Charlotte Ridout, 128; his ill-health, 128; report of his marriage, 147; he reproves E. C., 160–162, 164; is reproved by her, 166–167; an excursion to London, 170–179, 181, 182; Poet's Club planned, 173; "30 lines of verse a day," 177; his relations to John Hatchard, 178; his giddiness, 200; election business, 211–214, 236, 237, 244; in London, 219; his *Tales of the Hall*, 133, 220, 222, 223, 226, 232, 235, 256; parochial work, 234; he exchanges books with Byron, 235; the poverty of poets, 241, 242, 247, 269; his critics, 242, 243; meets Sir W. Scott, 248; his fear of disease, 249, 250; a thinning correspondence, 251; his bachelorhood, 252; George IV's coronation, 253, 254; his illness, 258–260, 267, 268, 270, 271, 287, 289, 292; at Holyrood House, 263; as a critic, 265;

memories of Sidmouth, 272, 273; end of correspondence with E. C., 278, 279; a letter from Alethea Lewis, 281; on religion, 284, 285, 288; on trade disputes, 293; his death (Feb. 3, 1832), 295; an appreciation by William Wordsworth, 297; an early poem, 298.
His Journal (June 26–July 21, 1817), 170–176
Letter to Francis Chantry—
Dec. 15, 1822, 258–259
Letters to George Crabbe (*fils*)—
Feb. 16, 1824, 267
May 4, 1826, 287–289
Letter to John Crabbe—
Aug. 9, 1822, 255–257
Letters to Elizabeth Charter—
March 6, 1815, 77–78
March 14, 1815, 78–80
May 15, 1815, 81–86
June 6, 1815, 87–90
July 2 and 3, 1815, 91–96
July 26, 1815, 97–100
Aug. 23, 1815, 101–104
Sept. 11, 1815, 106–109
Nov. 11, 1815, 110–112
Nov. 25, 1815, 113–117
Dec. 26, 1815, 117–121
Jan. 2, 1816, 123–127
Feb. 26, 1816, 128–130
Spring, 1816, 130–132
May 1, 1816, 133–137
July 18, 1816, 138–141
Sept. 1816, 142–145
Oct. 12, 1816, 146–149
Feb. 11, 1817, 151–155
March, 1817, 156–157
April, 1817, 157–158
May 3, 1817, 158–162
June 6, 1817, 163–166
June 20, 1817, 166–170
July 12, 1817, 177–182
Aug. 20, 1817, 186–190
Sept. 11, 1817, 191–193
Sept. 24, 1817, 194–195
Oct. 29th, 1817, 195–197
Dec. 1, 1817, 198–199
Feb. 5, 1818, 200–203
? 1818, 203–206
April 15, 1818, 207–209
June 6, 1818, 209–211
? 1818, 214–216
Sept. 14, 1818, 216–218
Oct. 31, 1818, 219–221
Dec. 23, 1818, 222–225
March 26, 1819, 228–231
Aug. 25, 1819, 232–237
Oct. 1819, 238–241
Dec. 14, 1819, 244–246
April 7, 1820, 248–250
July 16, 1821, 252–254
Jan. 27, 1823, 259–262
March 27, 1823, 264–266
July 8, 1824, 267–270
Nov. 9, 1824, 270–274
May, 1827, 275–278
Letter to "F. F.," 49
Letter to John Forster, 296
Letter to J. Hatchard—
Nov. 11, 1819, 242–244
Letters to Sarah Hoare—
Dec. 3, 1825, 283–286
Jan. 27, 1829, 292–295
Letters to Mary Leadbeater—
Sept. 18, 1818, 218–219
Feb. 17, 1820, 247
Letter to Dean of Lincoln—
Feb. 11, 1815, 25, 46

Letter to Thomas Moore—
Feb., 1818, 226–227
Letters to Thomas Timbrell—
Spring, 1814, 21–24
Crabbe, George (*fils*), 10, 11, 24, 25, 122, 202, 208, 224, 225, 230, 267, 276, 282, 287, 296
Crabbe, John Waldron, 151, 255–257, 290
Crabbe, Mrs., 10, 11, 222
Croker, J. W., 223
Crowe, William, 184–186
Crowfoot, Anna Maria, 151, 265, 299

D

Dansey, Capt. Charles, 56, 70, 208, 209
Dansey, Col. William, C.B., 53
Davy, Sir H., 299
Day, Thomas, 91
Dewson, Miss, 255
Dictionary of National Biography, 33, 36
"Doctor Syntax," 35
Douglas, Rev. William, 157–160, 163, 167, 171, 172, 175, 176, 213, 229, 230, 231

E

Eagles, John, 72
Edgeworth, Maria, 218
Edinburgh Review, 240
Ekins, Dr., 21
Elba, 31
Epicure's Almanack, The, 175
Errol, Lady, 175
Errol, Lord, 263
Erskine, Lord, 172
Everett, John, 212, 230, 246
Everett, Miss, 105, 108, 109, 154, 230
Everett, W., 105, 157

F

"Fanny F.," 48, 49, 50
Father and Daughter, 220–222
FitzGerald, Edward, 44, 100
Fletcher, Mrs., 255
Floyd, Gen. Sir John, 46
Forster, John, 296
Fox, C. J., 66, 171, 177
Frere, J. H., 175, 176

G

Gell, Sir William, 36
Gentleman's Magazine, 46, 282
George the Fourth, King, 31, 262
Gibbes, Sir George, 275
Gifford, William, 223
Gilpin, William, 35
Glengarry, Lady, 263
Goldsmith, Oliver, 50
Gordon, Duchess of, 171
Gower, Lord, 173
Grimaldi, Joseph, 29
Guyenette, F. J., 30

H

Hallam, Henry, 223
Hatchard, John, 143, 170, 178, 194, 198, 223, 242
Heaviside, James, 30
Hoare, Samuel, 27, 33, 127, 142, 153, 155, 165, 166, 198, 216, 217, 220, 224, 228, 239, 257, 267, 269, 291, 297
Hoare, Sarah, 47, 48, 153, 198, 267, 277, 278, 283, 291, 292–294, 298, 299
Hoare, Mrs., 153, 179, 188, 198, 235, 267

Holland, Lord, 168, 172, 235
Hook, Theodore, 223
Horner, 177
Houghton, Col., 276
Houlton, Col., 25, 86, 91, 149, 150
Houlton, Mrs., 86, 91, 106, 124
Huchon, M., 11, 33, 40, 43, 44, 50, 149, 150
Hume-Williams, Joseph, Q.C., 301
Hume-Williams, W. E., K.C., 301
Humphreys, A. L., 178
Hunt, Henry, 155
Hunt, Leigh, 247, 296
Huskisson, William, 176

I

Improved Bath Guide, 30
Incledon, C. B., 29

J

Jersey, Lady, 103
Johnson, Samuel, 28
Johnstone, Rev. William, 282
Jordan, Mrs., 28, 31

K

Kean, Edmund, 15, 29
Keats, John, 247
Kemble, Charles, 15, 29, 172
Kent, Duke of, 182
King, James, 29, 30
Knight, Henry Galley, 261

L

Lake Poets, The, 247
Lamb, Lady Caroline, 171, 176
Lamb, Charles, 64, 73, 74, 105
Lansdowne, Lord, 39
Leadbeater, Mary, 50, 51, 149, 197, 218, 219, 246, 279
Leland, John, 17
Lewis, Alethea, 279–282
Lincoln, Dean of, 20, 25, 45, 46
Linley, Miss, 34
Littleton, Sir Edward, Bart., 282
Liverpool, Lord, 212
Lockhart, J. Gibson, 255, 264
Long, Anne, 103, 107, 108
Long, Flora, 46, 95, 96, 103, 107, 108, 120, 122, 127, 153, 165
Long, Richard G., 91, 103, 107, 122, 127, 146, 215, 254
Lytton, Bulwer, 296

M

Mackenzie (the "Man of Feeling"), 255, 264
Macready, William, 29
Malet, Rev. Alexander, 52, 53
Malet, Sir Alexander, 56, 58, 60, 75
Malet, Alfred Augustus, 57
Malet, Arthur, 57
Malet, Charles Warre, 53, 101
Malet, Charles St. Loe, 57
Malet, Edward Baldwin, 57
Malet, Elizabeth, 52
Malet, Col. G. Grenville, 57
Malet, Hugh Poyntz, 57
Malet, Octavius Warre, 57
Malet, W. Wyndham, 57
Malet, Lady, 53, 54, 56–58, 75, 81, 157–159, 165–167, 169, 190, 193, 201, 205, 209, 220, 224, 229, 231, 241, 270, 272, 274, 277, 300

Mathews, Major, 34
Meadows, Sir William, 55
Melbourne, Lord, 176
Methuen, Lord, 231
Methuen, Paul, 212, 217, 231, 237
Mildmay, Sir H. P. St. John, 231
Milman, Henry, 265–267
Milton, John, 75
Montgomery, 247
Moore, Thomas, 39, 64, 66, 87, 105, 106, 163, 165, 171–174, 176, 201, 203, 206, 211, 223, 226, 227, 231, 241, 247, 275, 299
More, Hannah, 28
Morning Chronicle, 172
Mortimer, Hill, 21, 22, 228
Murray, John, 137, 172, 175, 223, 224, 232, 235, 240, 242, 244, 249, 255, 261, 269, 274, 276

N

Nash, Beau, 27, 30
Norris, Edward, 81, 134
Norris, Henry, 38, 79, 80, 86
Norris, Mrs., 82, 86, 89, 95, 103, 114, 120, 124, 130, 131, 134, 136, 140, 141, 172, 175, 190

O

Opie, John, 221
Opie, Mrs., 220–222, 239
Ossory, Lord, 172

P

Pauy, General, 276
Peachey, Emma Frances, 64, 86, 95, 119, 125, 148, 229
Peachey, General, 52, 62, 64, 77, 81, 86, 89, 95, 125, 132, 148, 153, 201, 204, 229, 261
Perry, 172
Phillips, 173
Piozzi, Mrs., 28, 29
Pitt, William, 66
Pocket Magazine, 250
Pope, Alexander, 102, 105

R

Raphoe, Dean of, 51, 148, 149
Rejected Addresses, 172, 212
Ridout, Charlotte, 42–47, 59, 87, 88, 100, 104, 126, 127, 131, 148, 191, 197, 201, 203, 204, 299
Ridout, Mr., 43, 44
Rogers, Miss, 172
Rogers, Samuel, 163, 164, 170–174, 227, 232, 235, 247, 297
Romilly, Sir Samuel, 214
Rutland, Duchess of, 235
Rutland, Duke of, 14, 173, 217, 239, 244

S

Sandford and Merton, 90
Sarum, Bishop of, 182, 183
School for Scandal, The, 28
Scott, Lady, 256
Scott, Sir Walter, 18, 58, 112, 173, 223, 235, 241, 247, 248, 254–256, 260, 262, 263, 287, 297
Shackleton, Richard, 50
Shelley, Percy Bysshe, 75, 247
Sheridan, R. B., 28, 34, 66, 177
Shuldham, Admiral, 67, 68
Shuldham, Emily, 67, 68
Smiles, Samuel, 223

Smith, James and Horace, 172
Smith, J. B., 53
Smith, Sydney, 52, 177
Southey, Edith, 63, 75
Southey, Robert, 53, 58, 61–64, 66, 141, 247, 267
Sparkes, Mary, 280
Spencer, Mrs., 175, 177
Spencer, Rt. Hon. William, 51, 177
Stothard, 172

T

Tales of the Hall, 220, 222, 223, 226, 232, 235, 256
Talma, F. J., 172
Thatched House Club, The, 247, 248
Timbrell, Caroline, 24
Timbrell, Thomas, 21–24, 288
Trowbridge, 14–21, 27, 29, 33, 37, 39, 43, 44, 46, 47, 49, 77, 82, 83, 90, 91, 93, 95, 103, 104, 106, 109, 112, 115, 122, 130, 131, 133, 137, 138, 142, 146, 151, 156, 158, 166, 169, 195, 207, 211, 214, 219, 227, 230, 232, 234, 244, 251, 252, 257, 258, 275–277, 288, 291, 292, 302

W

Waldron, John, 16, 19, 46, 196, 197, 230, 288, 295, 302
Waldron, Maria, 16, 19, 47, 105, 146, 166, 168, 193, 195, 198, 199, 203, 216, 232, 248
Walmesley, Mrs., 103, 107, 108, 122, 153
Warner, Rev. Richard, 33–35, 47, 155, 192
Waterloo, Battle of, 101, 104, 117, 135, 150
Wellesley, W. Long, 212–214
Wellington, Duke of, 213
Westall, Mr., 173, 201
Williams, Miss, 230
Wilson, Mrs., 51
Wordsworth, William, 74, 247, 266, 296
Wyke, George, 30

Y

Young, C. M., 29

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Earl Bathurst has in his possession a large quantity of Mary's letters, which he has allowed Miss Sandars to use, and the Duke of Portland's papers at Welbeck have also been placed at her disposal. The Earl of Orkney has kindly allowed the publishers to reproduce two portraits from his collection which have never previously been published. This book, therefore, ought to prove a highly important historical monograph, of something like permanent interest.

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The A B C of Japanese Art. By J. F. Blacker. Illustrated with 150 line and 100 half-tone illustrations, printed on art paper, 5s. net.

"An exceedingly useful and timely book. *It would be cheap at double the price.*"—*Court Journal.*

The A B C Guide to Mythology. By Helen A. Clarke. With several illustrations, 5s. net.

The author of this book has written and lectured on mythology for many years, and is, from study and research, well qualified to produce a work to supply the general need. She traces the rise and development of the various native myths through their Greek, Norse and Oriental phases, so that the book is an authoritative guide to the subject, and at the same time thoroughly interesting and entertaining.

The A B C Guide to Music. By D. Gregory Mason. With twelve illustrations, 5s. net.

In this work Mr. Mason discusses the theory of music in a simple and entertaining manner, and then treats in turn pianoforte, orchestral and vocal music, dealing with the master musicians and their work with sure insight and significant analysis. He has avoided technical expressions as far as possible, and his book may be recommended not only to young readers, but also to adult lovers of music wishing to increase their knowledge of musical art.

The A B C Guide to Pictures. By Charles H. Caffin. Author of "How to Study Pictures." Fully illustrated, 5s. net.

Mr. Caffin is a well-known author of books on art. In this book, with the object not so much to tell the reader what pictures to admire as to suggest the principles which will enable him to judge for himself what is most worthy of admiration, Mr. Caffin analyses the best qualities of art from well-known examples, and makes his point with the clearness and precision of a true critic.

The A B C Guide to American History. By H. W. Elson. With sixteen illustrations, 5s. net.

In a style that is at once picturesque and crisp, Mr. Elson tells the story of the growth of the modern America out of the land discovered by Columbus in 1492. The book, which is full of fascinating romance and incident, contains also, in its account of the rise of the United States, a considerable amount of thoughtful writing on the development of nations and the art of government.

The A B C of Collecting Old Continental Pottery. By J. F. Blacker. Author of "Nineteenth Century English Ceramic Art," etc. Illustrated with about 100 line and 50 half-tone illustrations, 5s. net.

In this new volume Mr. J. F. Blacker provides information and illustrations of wares never previously presented in an inexpensive form to the great army of collectors. Persian, Syrian, Anatolian and Rhodian wares, with the lustred Hispano Moresque and Siculo Moresque pottery take their place side by side with the Majolica of Italy, the Faience of France, the Delft of Holland, and the Stoneware of Germany.

The A B C about Collecting (Second Edition). By Sir James Yoxall, M.P. The subjects include, among others, China, Clocks, Prints, Books, Pictures, Furniture and Violins. With numerous illustrations, 5s. net.

"A beginner cannot well have a better guide."—*Outlook.*

The A B C of Collecting Old English Pottery. By J. F. Blacker. With about 400 line and 32 pages of half-tone illustrations, 5s. net.

"Practically every known variety of old English pottery is dealt with, and facsimiles of the various marks, and the prices realised by good examples at auction are given."—*Observer.* "Mr. Blacker speaks with authority, and his pages are full of knowledge."—*Bookman.*

The A B C of Collecting Old English China. By J. F. Blacker. With numerous line and 64 pages of half-tone illustrations, printed on art paper, 5s. net.

"To the beginner there could be no surer guide."—*Pall Mall Gazette.*

The A B C Dictionary of Modern Prose Quotations. A Classified Dictionary of Modern Thought in the form of Aphorisms and Epigrams in English from Blake to Bergson. By Holbrook Jackson, Author of "Great English Novelists," etc., 5s. net.

A fascinating and valuable collection of the wit and wisdom of one of the most brilliant centuries of the world's history. It is at once an anthology and a useful reference volume, and Mr. Holbrook Jackson may be relied upon as an editor of knowledge and discretion.

More About Collecting. By Sir James Yoxall, M.P. Author of "The A.B.C. about Collecting," etc. Large crown 8vo, cloth gilt, with about 100 illustrations, 5s. net.

This work is written in an interesting and entertaining style, and so arranged that readers who have little knowledge or experience of the hobby which they wish to take up, may find exactly the information they require put plainly and tersely.

Nineteenth Century English Ceramic Art. By J. F. Blacker. With coloured frontispiece and over 1,200 examples. Illustrated in half-tone and line.

"One of the cheapest art manuals that has appeared in the present generation. Invaluable to all lovers of historic ware."—*Daily Telegraph.*

STANLEY PAUL'S

NEW SIX SHILLING NOVELS

A Grey Life: A Romance of Bath. "RITA"

Author of "Peg the Rake," "My Lord Conceit," "Countess Daphne," "Grim Justice," etc.

"Rita" has chosen Bath as the setting for her new novel. She has disdained the "powder and patches" period, and given her characters the more modern interests of Bath's transition stage in the seventies and eighties. Her book deals with the struggles of an impoverished Irish family of three sisters, living at Bath, to whom comes an orphaned niece with the romantic name of Rosaleen Le Suir. "Rita" claims that an Irish adventurer, named Theophrastus O'Shaughnessy, who plays an important part in this book, is the male prototype of her own immortal "Peg the Rake."

The Destiny of Claude. MAY WYNNE

Author of "Henri of Navarre," "The Red Fleur-de-Lys," "Honour's Fetters," etc.

To escape a convent life, Claude de Marbeille joins her friend Margot de Ladrennes in Touraine. Jacques, Comte de Ladrennes, a hunchback, falls in love with her, and when the two girls go to Paris to enter the suite of the fifteen year old Mary Queen of Scots, he follows and takes service with the Duke of Guise. There follow many romantic and exciting adventures concerning the perilous childhood of Mary Queen of Scots, into which the characters of the story are brought by acts of treachery and the work of spies. The hero, a young officer of the Scottish Guards, is imprisoned and threatened with poison, and much of the story relates his ardent search after his sweetheart, who has been betrayed into captivity by the jealousy of a friend. This is a thoroughly good story.

The King's Master. OLIVE LETHBRIDGE and JOHN DE STOURTON

A novel dealing with the troublous times of Henry VIII., in which the political situation, Court intrigues and religious discussions of the period are treated in a masterly manner. A strong love element is introduced, and the characters of Anne Boleyn and Thomas Cromwell are presented in an entirely new light, while plot and counter-plot, hair-breadth escapes, love, hate, revenge, and triumph, all go to form the theme.

The Celebrity's Daughter. VIOLET HUNT

Author of "The Doll," "White Rose of Weary Leaf," etc.

"The Celebrity's Daughter," which, like Miss Violet Hunt's other novels, is founded on a much-entangled plot, only fully unravelled in the last chapter, is the autobiography of the daughter of a celebrity who has fallen on evil days. The book is told in the author's own inimitable style, with the humour, the smart dialogue, and the tingling life of her earlier novels.

Hunt the Slipper.

OLIVER MADOX HUEFFER (JANE WARDLE). Author of "The Artistic Temperament," "The Lord of Latimer Street," "Margery Pigeon," "Where Truth Lies," etc.

Those readers of Mr. Oliver Madox Hueffer's novels who remember his "Marjorie Pigeon" and "The Artistic Temperament," will be charmed by this new novel from the same pen. It is the love story of a young Englishman of good family who goes to the United States in search of a fortune. The story is founded on an ingenious plot and set forth in an original manner.

Cheerful Craft.

R. ANDOM

Author of "We Three and Troddles," "Neighbours of Mine," etc. With 60 illustrations by Louis Gunnis.

There is nothing sombre or introspective about "Cheerful Craft," and those who agree with Mr. Balfour's view of the need of lighter and brighter books will find here something to please them, since broad humour and rollicking adventure characterise the story. A city clerk rises from obscurity to a position of wealth and dignity, and carries us with him all the way, condoning his rascality for the sake of his ready humour and cheery optimism. After all he is a merry rogue, and he works no great harm to anyone, and much good to himself, and incidentally to most of those with whom he comes in contact. This amusing story does credit to the writer's ingenuity without putting too great a strain on the credulity of the reader.

The Three Destinies.

J. A. T. LLOYD

Author of "The Lady of Kensington Gardens," "A Great Russian Realist," etc.

This story relates the adventures of three young girls and a boy of eighteen, who meet by chance before the statue of "The Three Fates" in the British Museum, and there attract the attention of an old professor who determines to bring them together again, and experiment with their young lives with the curiosity of a chemist experimenting with chemicals. The scene shifts in turn to Ireland, to Paris, Brittany, and Vienna, and the hero is always under the spell of that first chance meeting in front of the statue. One person after the other plays with his life, and again and again he and the others report themselves on New Year's Day to the old professor, who reads half mockingly the jumble of lives that he himself has produced, until in the end the hero realises that these young girls have become to him in turn modern interpreters of the three ancient Destinies.

Columbine at the Fair.

KATE HORN

Author of "Susan and The Duke," "The White Owl," etc.

Miss Kate Horn has here taken up an entirely new line. Leaving the style which made "Edward and I and Mrs. Honeybun" so successful, she here gives a critical study of a girl whose soul lies dormant until the touch of love and self sacrifice awakes it by the hand of a little child. Much success is expected for her new story.

The Unworthy Pact.

DOROTHEA GERARD

Author of "The City of Enticement," "Exotic Martha," etc.

The story of a young man, who, having inherited an estate from an uncle believed to have died intestate, finds a will which puts as a condition of his inheritance the renunciation of his faith. He hesitates to do this and hides the will for some years, suffering all the while from the knowledge of his misdeed. The events resultant from this secret are related with a true insight and with a sense of drama and of pathos.

The Honour of the Clintons. ARCHIBALD MARSHALL

Author of "Exton Manor," "The Mystery of Redmarsh Farm," "The Eldest Son," etc.

The Clintons of Kencote will be very familiar to the many readers of Mr. Marshall's well-known novels, "The Squire's Daughter," and "The Eldest Son." The central idea of "The Honour of the Clintons" is to show the Squire confronted with a serious problem, in which neither wealth nor position can help him. He is in danger of falling into the deepest disgrace, and has nothing but his sense of honour on which to rely. How he comes through the trial forms the main interest of the story; but it is also concerned with the love affairs of the Clinton twins, Joan and Nancy, now grown up into beautiful young women.

The Eyes of Alicia. CHARLES E. PEARCE

Author of "The Amazing Duchess," "The Beloved Princess," "Polly Peachum," "Love Besieged," "Red Revenge," "A Star of the East," etc.

"The Eyes of Alicia" is the story of an impulsive, adventurous, handsome girl, brought up amid narrow surroundings and yearning for greater freedom. With the coming of womanhood she realizes her power of personal attraction and takes advantage of it in following her wayward impulses. The result is a catastrophe which shadows her whole life. The story is one of modern life in London, and while the scenes and characters have a vivid actuality, the mystery of Destiny hovers continually in the background.

A Modern Ahab. THEODORA WILSON WILSON

Author of "Bess of Hardendale," "Moll o' the Toll-Bar," etc.

This is a very readable novel in the author's best manner. Rachael Despenser, a successful artist, spends a summer holiday in a Westmoreland village, living at an old farm-house, and making friends with the villagers. Grimstone, a local baronet, is grabbing the land to make a deer run, and Rachael through championing the cause of a farmer comes into collision with him, although adored by his delicate little son. Right-of-way troubles ensue, and violence disturbs the peace. Grimstone's elder son and heir returns from Canada, where he has imbibed Radical notions. He sympathises with the villagers, and is attracted towards Rachael, whom he eventually marries. The baronet is determined to oust the farmer whom Rachael had championed, when the tragic death of his younger son leads him to relinquish the management of the estate to his heir.

Bright Shame. KEIGHLEY SNOWDEN

Author of "The Free Marriage," "The Plunder Pit," "Hate of Evil," etc.

Stephen Gaunt, an English sculptor famous in Italy, is the father of a son born out of wedlock of whom he has never heard. In his youth, a light attachment broken in a causeless fit of jealousy drove him abroad, but when the story opens he comes home to execute a commission, and meets his son without knowing him. In doing so, he encounters a childless couple, who have passed the boy off as their own since infancy, when his mother died. They are an elder half-brother, who has always hated Stephen, and his sensitive, tender and simple wife, who loves the boy with all her heart, fears to lose him, and yet is tormented by her secret. A romantic friendship springs up between son and father; and the chain of accidents and proofs by which he learns the truth, his struggle for control of the boy, and the effect of these events on the boy and his foster mother make a fascinating story.

The Strolling Saint. RAFAEL SABATINI

Author of "Bardelys, the Magnificent," "The Lion's Skin," etc.

Mr. Sabatini lays before his readers in "The Strolling Saint" a startling and poignant human document of the Italian Renaissance. It is the autobiographical memoir of Augustine, Lord of Mondolfo, a man pre-natally vowed to the cloister by his over-devout mother. With merciless self-analysis are revealed Augustine's distaste for the life to which he was foredoomed, and his early efforts to break away from the path along which he is being forced. As a powerful historical novel "The Strolling Saint" deserves to take an important place, whilst for swiftness of action and intensity of romantic interest it stands alone.

The Poodle-Woman. ANNESLEY KENEALY

Author of "Thus Saith Mrs. Grundy," etc.

Miss Annesley Kenealy's new novel, the first volume of the new "Votes for Women" Novel Series, deals with the feminine side of the great unrest of our time and endeavours to answer the question, "What do Women Want?" It is a charming love story, dealing mainly with two women, a man, and a mannikin. It present, femininism from an entirely fresh standpoint, and in a series of living pictures shows how the games of life and matrimony are played under rules which put all the best cards of the pack into men's hands. The heroine is an emotional Irish girl, with the reckless romance of the Celt and the chivalry of a woman, who remains sweet through very bitter experiences. The book is full of humour.

The Romance of Bayard. LIEUT.-COL. ANDREW C. P. HAGGARD, D.S.O. Author of the "The France of Joan of Arc," "Louis XI, and Charles the Bold," etc.

Colonel Haggard is never more happy than when he writes of days and people famous in history, and here, with much success, he has cleverly woven a romantic novel out of an equally romantic historical chronicle. He gives us memories of the French Court under Francis I., and of the gallant part played by the great Bayard; stories of our own Henry VIII. and Anne Boleyn; gay pictures of the meeting of the two monarchs and of the jousting and feasting on the Field of the Cloth of Gold; and stirring chapters on the war in which Bayard, faithful lover and true knight, met a soldier's death.

The Career of Beauty Darling. DOLF WYLLARDE

Author of "The Riding Master," "The Unofficial Honeymoon," etc. (7th edition).

This novel, at present in its eighth edition, is a story of the musical comedy stage, which endeavours to set forth without prejudice the vices and virtues of the life; and, in the account of the heroine's adventures, how she ran away from home at fourteen, went on the stage in a children's chorus, and found herself henceforth the sport and spoil of the men around her, Miss Wyllarde has made plain statements and has not shrunk from the realism of life. It is "an absorbing story," and according to *The Court Journal* "should be put in the hands of all parents who have daughters with any hankering after a stage career."

Francesca. CECIL ADAIR

Author of "The Qualities of Mercy," "Cantacute Towers," etc.

Miss Adair has excelled herself in Francesca, which is a delightful story full of beautiful thoughts and idyllic touches. This author has been said to resemble the late Rosa N. Carey in possessing all the qualities which make for popularity, and the ability to arrest and maintain the reader s interest from the first page to the last

Life's Last Gift. — Louis de Robert

With a preface by Dr. F. A. Hedgcock. (The book for which a committee of Parisian ladies awarded the prize of £200 for the best French novel published in 1911.)

This "poignant and convincing narrative" tells of a young ambitious man who is overwhelmed by the dread of impending disaster. He struggles to free himself, but only becomes more deeply entrapped. In his misery and dread there comes as "Life's Last Gift" a romantic passion which cannot be requited but estranges him for a time from those most dear, and then leaves him to turn with a renewal of faith to the arms which he has shunned.

The beauty of this book lies in its absolute sincerity and truth. It speaks to all men and women who realise how great and terrible a possession is life.

Brave Brigands. — May Wynne

Author of "The Red Fleur-de-Lys," "The Destiny of Claude," etc., etc.

At the time of the French Revolution, during the siege of Carpentras by the "Brave Brigands"—the soldiers of an Irishman named Patri—an attack is frustrated by the cleverness and courage of a young girl, who, in her adventures, mysteriously disappears. In quick succession there follow events concerning the plots and counter plots of aristocrats, papalists and revolutionaries, and amid adventures of love and war the story leads up to the famous "Glacier Massacres." It is thrilling and romantic from beginning to end.

Tainted Gold. — H. Noel Williams

Author of "A Ten Pound Penalty," "Five Fair Sisters," etc.

Gerald Carthew, a young London Barrister, whose career has hitherto been quite uneventful, suddenly finds himself involved in circumstances which leave no room for doubt that a dastardly conspiracy has been formed against his life. For some time, however, all attempts to discover the instigators or their motive are unsuccessful; and it is not until Carthew's greatest friend has fallen a victim in his stead, and he himself has been nearly lured to destruction by a beautiful American girl who has been made the innocent decoy of the conspirators, that the truth is revealed. The story, the action of which is laid in England, New York and at the Riviera, contains some thrilling moments and a most unexpected dénouement.

The Lost Destiny. — G. Villiers Stuart

"The Lost Destiny" is a novel showing the working of the 'unseen hand,' and telling the story of a man who shirked his destiny and was forced to watch the career of another who rose to heights of national fame, while he himself drifted like chaff before the wind. It is a striking novel, full of incident, and illustrating the relationship of life and destiny.

His Magnificence. — A. J. Anderson

Author of "The Romance of Fra Filippo Lippi," "The Romance of Sandro Botticelli," etc.

In this fascinating volume, Mr. A. J. Anderson gives a picture of the extraordinary personality of Lorenzo de Medici (Lorenzo the Magnificent) amid a strong setting of the love, fighting, plotting, assassinations, religion and paganism of the Italian Renaissance.

The Curse of the Nile. DOUGLAS SLADEN

Author of "The Unholy Estate," "The Tragedy of the Pyramids," etc.

A novel dealing with the city of Khartum and the Egyptian Desert. Mr. Sladen is at his best when he is describing exciting scenes, and the book is full of them; but, like his other novels, it is also full of romance. It tells the story of a beautiful white woman who, being captured at the fall of Khartum, has to enter the harem of Wad-el-Nejumi, the bravest of all the generals of the Mahdi. When she is rescued on the fatal field of Toski, the question arises, Can the hero, an Englishman, marry her? Great figures stand forth in Mr. Sladen's pages—above all, the heroic Gordon in his last moments at Khartum.

The Memoirs of Mimosa. Edited by ANNE ELLIOT

The intimate and unflinching confession of a brilliant, erotic, and undisciplined woman, who resolves "to live every moment of her life," and succeeds in so doing at the cost of much suffering to herself and others. Her mixture of worldliness, sentiment, fancy, passion, and extraordinary *joie de vivre* make her a fascinating study of a type somewhat rare. At her death she bequeathed these Memoirs to the woman friend who edits them and presents them to the world. We get the woman's point of view in all matters—poetry, politics, sport, music, the stage, and, dominating all, the great problems of sex.

Dagobert's Children. L. J. BEESTON

The interest of this novel is centred in a little band of franc-tireurs who, under the leadership of Count Raoul Dagobert, harass the flanks of the German army corps in the Franco-German War. That Dagobert and his "children" are veritable fire-eaters is soon shown by the surprise and slaughter of a small but venturesome company of Prussians. The account of the subsequent doings of these irregulars is one of sustained excitement, and we follow the adventures of Mr. Beeston's hero with the more interest since the author has been at pains to give him personality. There are some vivid descriptions in the novel, which is well written and spirited.

The Redeemer. RENÉ BAZIN

Author of "The Children of Alsace," "The Nun," "Redemption," etc.

This is a moving and profoundly powerful romance of village life in the Loire country. It is the love story of a beautiful young French school teacher and a worker in the neighbouring slate quarries, who are for a time separated by the man's previous inclination towards a woman living away from her husband. The development of the heroine, strongly held in check by her moral feelings, and the attitude of the hero to the woman to whom he is already united, are told with considerable insight, power and charm.

Her Majesty the Flapper. A. E. JAMES

With a picture wrapper of "Her Majesty" in colours.

A diverting chronicle of the prankish doings of a "Flapper," pretty and fifteen, as recorded partly by herself and partly by her grown-up cousin Bobbie, whose life she makes quite a series of excitements and surprises. The story ends with the coming out of the Flapper, when the final victimisation of Bobbie takes the form of an engagement. "It is," says the *Sunday Times*, "one of the most amusing books that has appeared for a long time," and its pages are full of bright and sparkling dialogue, which make it "one of the most delightful books imaginable."

The Fruits of Indiscretion. Sir William Magnay

Author of "The Long Hand," "Paul Burdon," etc.

A story of murder and mystery in which the interest is well sustained and the characters are convincing. On the eve of a country house wedding, the best man is killed on the hunting field. Captain Routham is asked to take his place, but suddenly disappears and his body is found on the railway track. With the help of Rolt, a famous detective, the mystery is gradually cleared up, and is brought at last to a startling dénouement.

The Return of Pierre. Donal Hamilton Haines

With a frontispiece from a painting by Edouard Detaille.

Against the vivid background of the Franco-German War, there shines out, in this novel, the very human story of Pierre Lafitte, a French country lad. Other prominent figures in the story are the woman Pierre loves, her father—a fine old Colonel of Dragoons—and a German spy, not without attractive qualities, whose fate becomes entangled with theirs. The book abounds in striking situations, including the discovery and escape of the spy, the departure of the Dragoons for the war, the remorse of a French General who feels personally responsible for the men he has lost, a night in a hospital-tent, the last flicker of the defence of Paris, and the entry of the German troops. It is a remarkable book.

A Babe in Bohemia. Frank Danby

Author of "The Heart of a Child," "Dr. Phillips," etc., etc. (11th edition).

Frank Danby, to gain information for this novel, joined the Salvation Army, went through their training home and Refuge at Clapton, and finally became attached to the depôt of the so-called "Gutter, Slum and Garret Brigade," from which the work among the very poorest is carried out. This full-length novel, having been out of print, has now been practically re-written by the author, and although the thread of the story remains, every page has been extensively revised, and it will be found to be as good as anything recently done by this popular writer.

The She-Wolf. Maxime Formont

Author of "A Child of Chance," etc. Translated from the French by Elsie F. Buckley.

This is a powerful novel of the life and times of Cæsare Borgia, in which history and romance are mingled with a strong hand. The story is told of the abduction of Alva Colonna on the eve of her marriage with Propero Sarelli, when she is carried off to his palace at Rome and becomes his slave-mistress. The subsequent events, more or less following history or tradition, include the introduction of the dark woman of gipsy extraction, who enamours Cæsare, and poisons the wine by which the Colonna and her old lover Sarelli die. The story closes with a description of Cæsare's last days and death. This novel has passed through several editions in France.

The Price of Friendship. E. Everett-Green

Author of "Clive Lorimer's Marriage," "Duckworth's Diamonds," "Galbraith of Wynyates," etc., etc.

Miss Everett-Green has had a remarkable output of novels in the past, but this one, her latest, is the longest—and strongest—standing to her name. It is the story of a man who impersonates his friend, from the very best of motives and plunges himself into complications and dangers. Like all of this author's tales, it finishes with a startling climax.

Called to Judgment. CORALIE STANTON AND HEATH HOSKEN. Authors of "The Muzzled Ox," "The Swelling of Jordan," etc.

One of the most thrilling stories of mystery, love and adventure which these popular collaborators have ever written. It is a vivid, human story, red-hot with incident and excitement, the central character being a man, who, after ten years' imprisonment for fraud, returns to the world with his past so effectively buried that he is known as a man of wealth, a Member of Parliament, and an Advocate for Prison Reform. The tale is said to be worthy of Poe or Gaboriau.

The Split Peas. HEADON HILL

Author of "Troubled Waters," "A Rogue in Ambush," "The Thread of Proof," etc.

The interest of this story centres in the attempt of a socialistic, time-serving Cabinet Minister, aided and abetted by a mysterious foreigner, who poses as a Soho revolutionary but is in reality a spy, to undermine the loyalty of the British Army. His efforts are frustrated by a young officer of the Guards, with the assistance of two lively Eton boys. Mr. Headon Hill is himself an old Etonian, and he has put much local colour into his book.

Captain Hawks, Master Mariner. OSWALD KENDALL

Admirers of the novels of Mr. W. W. Jacobs should read this. It is a story of three men who cannot and will not abide dulness. Though separated superficially by discipline and convention, Captain Hawks, Grummet and "Cert'nly" Wilfred are brothers "under their skins," and are controlled by the same insatiable desire for variety. Their thirst for the unexpected is amply satisfied in the search for an illusive cargo of sealskins, purchased without having been seen by Captain Hawks. That the crew are nearly drowned, frozen, starved, and smothered, proves that they succeeded in a search for a life where things happen. A capital yarn.

A Star of the East: A Story of Delhi. CHARLES E. PEARCE. Author of "The Amazing Duchess," "The Beloved Princess," "Love Besieged," "Red Revenge," etc.

This book completes the trilogy of Mr. Pearce's novels of the Indian Mutiny, of which "Love Besieged" and "Red Revenge" were the first and second. The scene is laid in Delhi, the city of all others where for the past hundred years the traditions of ancient dynasties and the barbaric splendours of the past have been slowly retreating before the ever-advancing influence of the West. The conflict of passions between Nara, the dancing girl, in whose veins runs the blood of Shah Jehan, the most famous of the Kings of Delhi, and Clare Stanhope, born and bred in English conventionality, never so pronounced as in the Fifties, is typical of the differences between the East and the West. The rivalry of love threads its way through a series of exciting incidents, culminating in the massacre and the memorable siege of Delhi.

A Gentlewoman of France. RENÉ BOYLESVE

This novel, crowned by the Academy, has had a great vogue in France, twelve editions having been sold. It is the story of a provincial girl who makes a marriage of convenience with a man who sees in her the best qualities of wifehood and motherhood. The story shows how before great temptation she stands firm and emerges chastened but conquering.

In simple, direct fashion, the sweet and most admirable wife tells her story, and it rings extraordinarily true.

Ralph Raymond. — Ernest Mansfield

With eight original drawings.

In this story the hero, falsely accused of murder, escapes to New Zealand, and there, after many interesting adventures among the mining camps, is finally rearrested and brought back to England, where in an intensely dramatic scene his innocence is proved. The author is himself a prospector well-known both in the City and in every mining district the world over, and his story contains many revelations of mining life and adventure.

Mrs. Brett. — M. Hamilton

Author of "Cut Laurels," "The First Claim," etc.

The author of "Cut Laurels" may be relied on to write a good novel, and this story, the scene of which is laid in India, has been chosen as a particularly clever piece of work. The plot is original and one difficult to work out, but the author has succeeded with great skill and delicacy.

Galbraith of Wynyates. — E. Everett-Green

Author of "Duckworth's Diamonds," "Clive Lorimer's Marriage," etc.

The owner of Wynyates has let the property to a relative who is the next-of-kin after his only daughter. Warned of the uncertainty of his own life he wills the property to his daughter in trust during her minority, and appoints as trustee a relative who is tenant of the property. Overhearing a conversation between the family lawyer and her uncle, who discuss the wisdom of placing her in the charge of one who is directly interested in her death, she imagines all kinds of evil intentions on the part of her guardian, and looks with suspicion upon all his counsels for her welfare. Love interests lead to complications between the heroine, her trustee and her lover. "Galbraith of Wynyates" is a very readable book written in the author's best style.

Maggie of Margate. — Gabrielle Wodnil

Author of "Brineta at Brighton."

"Maggie of Margate," a beautiful girl with an unobtrusive style which attracted nine men out of ten, was in reality an exclusive lady of title, bored because she sighed for realism and romance while affianced to a prospective peer. Maggie is a delightful creation, and her very erring frailty and duplicity make us pity her the more. She cannot break away finally from her social status, but to retain it she nearly breaks her heart. The man of her fancy, Michael Blair, is the most striking figure in the whole story, which holds us intently from the first page to the last. All the world loves a lover, and, therefore, every one will love Michael Blair.

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